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THE
PIOUS COMMUNICANT

ENCOURAGED,

AND DIRECTED IN WHAT MANNER HE MAY APPROACH

The Holy Supper of the Lord,

ACCEPTABLY TO GOD, AND PROFITABLY TO HIMSELF.

IN A SERIES OF LECTURES.

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T H E
PIOUS COMMUNICANT.

Lecture I.

ON THE NATURE OF FAITH.



ON an occasion like the present, when invited to an attendance on the holy Supper of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, to the end that your approach to that ordinance may contribute to your profit, we propose in this, and, if the Lord permit, in several succeeding lectures, to address you on the *nature* and the *blessed effects* which flow from true and saving faith. In the course of the discussion of these, many other truths, connected with them, will be elucidated, we hope in so plain, and yet in so faithful a manner, that on the one hand the natural man, God blessing our endeavours, may be reclaimed from his evil pursuits, and be directed in those paths which lead to happiness and eternal glory; and on the other, the child of God, amidst all his fears, doubts, and discouragements, may be counselled and directed, made to increase in faith, and wait upon his Father at the Redeemer's table in the experience of great peace and joy in believing.

With the eye of faith elevated to the Eternal's throne, we look for assistance in and wait for his blessing, upon our undertaking. We propose,

I. To consider the nature of faith, and investigate wherein its essential acts consist.

II. As faith is a necessary requisite, in approaching the table of the Lord, so we shall urge the natural man to the use of all those *means*, which, if accompanied with a blessing from on high, will tend to make him a partaker of that divine principle.

III. We shall point out the *grounds* on which a child of God may be assured of his being in the faith, and the *obligation* he is under to seek, to cherish, and preserve this Christian grace.

That we may speak with accuracy on the first proposed subject, it must be previously remarked,

1. That to believe is not *to be of the opinion*, or, *to be in doubt*, whether a thing be so or not, as the phrase is daily misapplied when conversing on natural things. It is not uncommon for a person to say, this or that I believe, whenever on the one hand reasons are offered for thus judging, and on the other some reason exists why he should doubt the fact. But this is not *believing*, it is rather to be considered as *doubting*, and in its nature is wholly different from the subject of this lecture.

2. To believe is not simply to have a persuasion or a knowledge of the existence of a thing: for a person may have this *persuasion*, and his mind yield no assent, yea, feel an aversion from it. In respect to natural objects, it may have place, but not in regard to those which are spiritual. For when things spiritual are the objects of our faith, it is always accompanied both with the full assent of the *judgment*, and the most cordial approbation of the *will*.

Throughout Scripture, where the term *faith*, and the phrase *to believe*, occur, both these ideas are included. And,

Therefore, saving faith implies, “A cordial reception of the testimony of God, and a total and unserved surrender of the soul and all its affections, to God and Christ.”

Hence faith is a term which no man can fully understand, unless he hath received and be exercised by it.

In the word of God, two particular phrases are employed to express this act.

The first is recorded Psalm ii. 12, and signifies in the original, *to take refuge*.

“Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.”

A similar expression presents itself, Psalm xxxvi. 8.

“How excellent is thy loving kindness, O God, therefore the children of men *put their trust* under the shadow of thy wings.”

The same word is found in other passages of Scripture, and always expresses the *essential* though *weaker* act of faith, to which salvation is attached.

The second phrase which scripture employs, signifies *to lean, to rest upon, or to suffer ourselves to be borne by another*, as a child, who feels itself perfectly secure, in the arms of its mother or nurse. Agreeably to this we read, Songs viii. 5.

“Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved?”

See also Psalm lxxxiv. 12. “O Lord of hosts, blessed is the man that *trusteth in thee*.”

Such and similar expressions represent that more *advanced degree* of faith, which consists in the exercise of *confidence*.

In the New-Testament, *to believe* is sometimes used

to convey to the mind the *object* of faith; thus, Gal. i. 23, the apostle declares, that “*he now preacheth the faith, which once he destroyed.*” But at other times it imports the act of the mind which is exercised with respect to that object, John iii. 36. “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life;” i. e. everlasting life is the portion of that person whose mind is so exercised with respect to the Son, as God here demands.

Of that faith we now speak, which actually unites the soul to Jesus; and that we may express ourselves, on a subject of such importance, with the perspicuity it merits, it will be proper to enquire,

I. What precedes faith.

II. Wherein the *true essence* of faith consists.

III. What *follows* as a consequence of faith.

1. If a person savingly believe, there must precede,

A. KNOWLEDGE. This is a requisite so necessary, that faith itself is thus termed, Isaiah liii. 11. By his *knowledge* shall my righteous servant justify many. Unless a truth be *known*, we cannot assent to it, embrace it, or be suitably exercised with respect to it.

There are therefore certain truths proposed as the objects of knowledge: they are in general the whole testimony of God, and in particular those which have an immediate regard to our eternal salvation. Hence we must attain to a knowledge of *ourselves*, and become acquainted with the *Great Mediator* of the covenant, with the *means* by which we become interested in him, and with the *obligation* we are under to become holy in heart, and in all manner of conversation.

Now as these truths must be known, in a greater or less degree, by every true believer, so we cannot

but remark, that every species of knowledge is not sufficient.—A knowledge which is merely speculative is not saving. There exists a vast difference between the knowledge which the natural man has of the truths of religion, and that which *he* possesses, whose soul hath been illuminated by the holy Spirit. The knowledge of the former is superficial and external; it skims along the surface, but dives not deep, to obtain the pith and marrow of truth: that of the latter is penetrating; it extends not barely to the *words*, but to the *matter*. The natural man may be enlightened as to the *head*, but divine truths affect not his *heart*. Is he taught that he is miserable, he feels not distress, sorrow, nor shame, at the awful discovery.—Are the glories of the Mediator brought to his view in the sacred oracles, he experiences no desires after him, at least not such as attracts him to Christ. For he hath never yet experimentally known his need of him. But the man who really believes, has his heart so affected with the truths of God, that the sight of sin and misery makes his soul to feel sorrow and the keenest anguish; whilst a view of Christ, as the only way of salvation, creates within him holy and ardent desires to have Jesus for his eternal portion.

B. The ASSENT of the mind to the truths of revelation necessarily precedes the essential act of faith.—But let it be remarked, that barely to assent to divine truths, as to the letter, is not all that is required: for such an assent cannot but be given to them by every ingenuous mind, since they perfectly accord with right reason, are in every respect worthy of God, in their nature tend to advance the happiness of man, and against them the infidel, bold in sin, raises his subtil but feeble objections in vain. If thus all within the pale of the reformed church must yield an

assent to *revelation*, and the glorious truths which it inculcates, it must be here observed, that the assent which the believer gives to them, far transcends that which is granted by external professors : because HE has felt, and daily more or less experiences, the power of the truths of God upon his heart ; he yields a two-fold assent ; his language is, “ I believe them, not “ only because God hath made them known in his “ word, and because they are stamped with his autho- “ rity, but because I experience their energy in my “ own soul ; and thus it is, that the Spirit, abiding “ in the heart, *testifies* that the Spirit which speaks “ in the sacred volume is *truth*.”

2. If this knowledge and this assent to divine truths always precede faith, the next enquiry is, “ In “ what does *the essential act of faith* consist ?” We answer ; in *running* and *fleeing* with all possible swiftness *from one's self*, and in taking refuge beneath the wings of Jesus, and his all-sufficient atonement.

We may then conceive the essential act of faith to be produced in the following manner : the holy Spirit, who alone must be considered as the author of it, imparts to the sinner a twofold view, both with respect to *himself*, and to the Lord Christ ; yes,

A. He sees himself, by nature, to be *miserable, wretched, undone* ; full in his view all his sins appear, accompanied with all their aggravated circumstances ; for it is the province of the Holy Ghost to reprove sin, or rather *to strike the sinner dumb*, so that he can bring in nothing in extenuation of his crimes, or in vindication of his conduct, John xvi. 8. This discovery of sin and misery being made, he becomes contrite, affected at the dreadful prospect which now presents itself, and is brought low before God. The pride of his heart falls, and so great is his abasement,

that he adapts to himself the language of Ephraim, Jer. xxxi. 19.

“ Surely after that I was turned I repented, and
 “ after I was instructed I smote upon my thigh, I
 “ was ashamed, yea even confounded, because I did
 “ bear the reproach of my youth.”

It will not be improper in this place just to remark, that if the sinner altogether desponds of obtaining help by any exertion of his own powers, in a condition so deplorable, it is to the end, that thereby he may be prepared ;

B. To *behold the Lord Jesus*, as the mighty Redeemer and Saviour, an object that to the wounded spirit, and to the soul that feels itself destitute of all help, is of all others the most precious and delightful ; for the Spirit discovers to him,

a. That *Jesus*, in order to become a Redeemer, received an *ordination* and *appointment* to his work from his Father, not in time, but before the commencement of all worlds.

b. That he is perfectly qualified to rescue sinners from ruin, and become their deliverer, because such is his all-sufficiency, that he can supply every want. *It pleased the Father, that in him all fulness should dwell*, Col. i. 13.

c. That he is also *willing* to bestow all that *he is*, and all that *he has*, on souls oppressed beneath an accumulated load of guilt, and filled with sore distress at a view of the dread picture which sin presents ; for the Scriptures abundantly testify, that he sustains the mediatorial natures, names, offices, and states, not so much on his own, as on account of sinners who feel the wretchedness of their case. Yes : such he invites, such he intreats, and such he most pressingly calls to come unto him.

These views cannot but produce the highest esteem for the Lord Jesus, and the most ardent desires after him, which are accompanied with a solicitous look to him for an interest in his merits; by all which the soul is exercising faith; for this twofold discovery produces a twofold act. Does one contemplate himself to be in condition so miserable? he begins then to reason thus: "If I continue in my present state, I have nothing to expect but certain death, and everlasting destruction; but if I may only be found in Jesus, then I am secure of eternal felicity."

What next follows? He runs, he flees from himself, he renounces all dependence on his own righteousness. He no longer seeks to obtain life by the energy of his own strength, but immediately betakes himself to the Lord Jesus, and to his complete righteousness, declaring that his soul desires to be found in him, as its only refuge, hiding-place, and safe asylum.

To express this act of faith, the word of God uses a great variety of phrases, each of which represents the frame in which the soul is, that makes application to him.

1. Sometimes the term *to seek* is employed for this purpose;

Psalms lxi. 32. *And your heart shall live that seek God.* In this case the soul is considered as having discovered itself to be lost, but at the same time, knowing that there is a way of recovery provided, as earnestly engaged in the use of every mean to find it out.

2. Sometimes the Spirit uses the phrase *to enquire after Christ*, Isai. xi. 10. *And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of*

the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek, i. e. apply for information: and thus expresses that frame of mind, whereby a person concludes that *salvation* is not in himself, but yet believing that his case is not altogether hopeless, enquires with anxious solicitude after that good way which the gospel reveals, that he may walk therein.

3. Sometimes the expression *to hearken* occurs, Psalm xlv. 10. *Hearken, O Daughter, and incline thine ear*. And then it intimates to us, that the person acting faith, duly considers every proposition which the Gospel makes, and listens with attention to all that the Eternal speaks in his word: yes, he inclines his ear, and like one whom pain and sickness confines to his bed, he is inquisitive to learn from his Physician, if any, what prospects appear, indicating a restoration from the disease under which he labours.

4. Sometimes the person is said *to lay hold of Christ*, Isai. xxvii. 5. *Or let him lay hold of my strength*. As one in danger of being drowned or burnt, will immediately seize the means of preservation which are at hand, so the soul, convinced of its being in the most imminent danger of everlasting destruction, that he may be rescued, cleaves fast hold of Jesus, the only Saviour of sinners, embraces him, and will not let him go, without receiving the promised blessing.

5. Sometimes it is set forth by the terms *to be willing*, Psalm cx. 3. *Thy people shall be willing* in the day of thy power; and thus represents the soul acting faith, as leaving the service of sin, cordially approving the proposals of the Gospel, and choosing to be saved in the way of his appointment.

6. Again, faith is represented by a *coming to Christ*,

Isai. lv. 3. *Come unto me*; and thus it implies, that whilst the Lord Jesus on his part makes an offer of himself, together with all his fulness, the soul on its part no sooner hears it than it comes to him, and renouncing self, and all that was its confidence before, seeks life in his name.

7. It is also called, a putting of one's trust in Christ, Psal. ii. 12. *Blessed are all they that put their trust in him*; and thus we are taught, that as the man-slayer, who would escape from the avenger of blood, flies with all possible haste to the city of refuge, or like one whom an enemy pursues, runs to the nearest place of safety, so the soul finding the name of the Lord to be a strong tower, runs into it, and is safe.

8. It is likewise styled *seeing* the Son and *looking unto Jesus*, John vi. 40. And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one that *seeth* the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life. Heb. xii. *Looking unto Jesus*, the author and finisher of our faith. These expressions are taken from the historical fact which Scripture records, of the brazen serpent on which the children of Israel, when bitten by the fiery serpents, might look, although it were with the eye of one who by reason of his wounds would excite the compassion of every beholder, and be healed: and thus is emblematical of that weaker act of saving faith, by which the soul, though ready to perish, addresses itself to Jesus, in humble confidence that he has mercy and compassion still in store.

9. Again it is denominated *choosing the Lord*. Joshua xxiv. 15, *Choose ye this day, whom ye will serve*: and it may be viewed as that act of the soul whereby, after the utmost deliberation, and frequently counting up the cost, it concludes to come out for

the Lord, boldly to engage in his service, and no longer *to halt between two opinions*.

10. Once more, it receives the appellation of *kissing the Son*, Psalm ii. 12. *Kiss the Son*. As by this kind of salutation in former times, particularly in the countries of the east, the subject expressed his allegiance to his sovereign, his submission to his authority, and full purpose of heart to obey his mandates, the soul that believes will own Jesus to be its king and Lord, his service will be its highest pleasure, and to obey the precepts of his law and gospel will always be its predominant desire, its supreme delight.

11. But again, this act of faith is especially exhibited to us, by the phrase *to hunger and thirst*, Matt. v. 6. Blessed are they which do *hunger and thirst* after righteousness. For it expresses the *sincerity*, the firmness, the vigour and perseverance, with which the believer is exercised, and denotes his determination to continue in the use of all the appointed means, until he may enjoy Christ, and receive out of his fulness, those blessings which alone can prove the satisfying portion of his soul.

12. Lastly, it is called a receiving Christ, John i. 12. As many as *received* him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name. To the end more fully to express the holy satisfaction, love and joy, which is experienced by the soul, on its becoming interested in Christ.

All these different modes of expression which the word of God records, do indeed exhibit the same essential act of faith, but at the same time they point out the different frames in which a person may be, when in the exercise of it. But if faith be acted acceptably to God, it must be done in such a manner

as Scripture points out: and therefore we remark, that whenever a person betakes himself to Jesus as his refuge,

A. He does it SINCERELY. No manslayer could run with greater swiftness to the city of refuge; no one bitten by the serpents in the wilderness could look with greater eagerness to the brazen serpent; no one ready to famish with hunger, or nigh to perishing by the want of water to quench his thirst, could more *sincerely* desire to obtain meat and drink, than the soul that runs and flies to Jesus, beholds him by faith, and hungers and thirsts after him.

B. He receives Jesus as the ONLY SAVIOUR. He renounces the service of sin, the world, and Satan. He considers the enemies of Jesus to be his own. He knows that Jesus alone is worthy of all his love, of all his time, and of all he can do. No more will he divide his heart between God and the world, but looking from and renouncing the latter, he exclaims, *I am thine, O David; I am on thy side, thou son of Jesse*, 1 Chron. xii. 8.

C. He receives Jesus as a *whole Saviour*, as one who is altogether lovely, and therefore makes no reservation. He receives him as to his states of humiliation and exaltation; and is willing not only to be exalted, but to be humbled, together with him. He takes him in his three offices; he is disposed to lie at his feet to be instructed by him, as the great prophet, whom God has raised in Zion. He will have him as his priest, to be the propitiation for his sins. He is inclined to be governed and ruled by him, as that glorious King whom the Eternal hath set on his holy hill. In a word, he receives him as to all his benefits: he is not only anxious to receive *eternal* life at his hands, but also to be sanctified by the holy Spirit.

D. He receives Christ not for a year, but for years ; not for the duration of his temporal existence, but *forever*. A believer will not return to the old Sodom which he hath left ; but both in prosperity and in adversity, in light and in darkness, in joy and in sorrow, in life and in death, in the present and in the future world, his soul will adhere to Jesus. Never did the apostle more clearly exhibit his confidence of his final perseverance, or declare the sentiment which obtains in every believer's heart, than in the 8th chapter of the epistle addressed to the Romans.

“ Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Now has a soul thus received the Lord Christ by faith ?

3. The following are the consequences which result from the exercise of it. Will it not wholly rely, and altogether depend upon him ? Will it not place the fullest confidence, both in his power and goodness ? Will it not feel a joyful persuasion and assurance of its being interested in him. But of this we shall speak more at large in the sequel.

Secondly, We now proceed to consider what means natural men ought to be found in the use of, that with the divine blessing, they may be made partakers of this inestimable benefit.

But as all who are in a natural estate, are not situated alike, and their respective circumstances are so dissimilar, it must be previously shewn, who those are who may profit by the means we are about to mention.

1. There are *men*, whose ignorance, indifference,

and insensibility are so great, that heaven or hell, salvation or damnation, seldom if ever are the subjects of their meditation—nay, who appear so like to the irrational part of creation, that if addressed on the subjects of religion, they can scarcely understand the import of the terms which are employed, much less form suitable conceptions of the subject matter of such interesting and important topics. Hence they are so devoid of feeling, that even were the bottomless pit, the receptacle of the damned, to be opened, and their ears assailed by the woes and the lamentations which those unhappy beings utter, they would seem unmoved and unaffected. Such are indeed the objects of compassion; but in vain is it to attempt to exhibit to *them* the means by which faith in Christ may be exercised. Yet however as they still live, and a possibility exists, that even such may be saved, we remark by the way, that *duty* urges even such to use every mean which is afforded, and by which they may attain to a knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus. We recommend to *their* notice particularly, a DILIGENT attendance at those places of public worship, where the light of the gospel shines forth by means of the word preached, and where Jesus makes himself known as one who opens the eyes of the blind, and maketh wise to salvation even those most ignorant and insensible amongst natural men, *who know not the things of the Spirit of God*, and to whom they are *foolishnesses* because they are only *spiritually* discerned. 1. Cor. ii. 14.

2. There are others, who, though not sunk so low in gloomy ignorance, yet are so infatuated by the world, so devoted to the transitory pleasures of this life, and so fond of the company of worldly men, that were we to represent the preciousness and the amiable-ness of Jesus, and set before them the *pleasantness*

of the *way*, and the peaceful nature of the *path* leading to heaven, or unfold in all their charms the glories of the eternal world, and the pleasures and joys which believers experience at and after this life, it is not likely that the smallest impressions would be made; for the *objects* which *they seek* to obtain, are things below, in preference to things above; things visible rather than those *not seen*—the creature before the *Creator*. Though these are fully convinced, that they have never experienced a change of heart, or been converted to God, yet they put off, to a future day, especially if they be in the vigor, pride, and bloom of youth, every anxious thought on that subject.

3. Many are so overwhelmed and perplexed with the distracting cares and employments of the world, that their days and nights are wholly spent in labouring and toiling to procure and accumulate riches and wealth for themselves and children. Men thus situated cannot be supposed to have leisure to *consider*, much less seriously to propose to themselves these solemn questions: "What is the present *state* and condition of my soul," and "what will it then be, when "I come to die?" We fear, if we urged on persons of this description the use of the means which we are about to prescribe, it would be productive of little or no advantage; for it seems they are determined to give themselves *no* trouble about them.

4. Others again, if exhorted to the exercise of faith, and the means be set before them, will frame an excuse of this kind, that the word of God inculcates "That by nature we are incapable of doing any good, "and inclined to all manner of wickedness; that faith "is the gift of God; that it is not of him that willeth, "nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth "mercy." If such be urged to attend to the things

which belong to their everlasting peace, and be pressed to seek by faith to obtain an interest in Christ; they are always ready with this reply: "it is impossible to procure it, though all our powers were exerted." Hence carelessness and indifferency ensue.

But, SINNERS, permit us simply to enquire.—Do you make this declaration from a heart which is filled with distress at contemplating that your inability constitutes a principal part of your misery? Or do you thus express yourselves to conceal your shame, and blame Deity? If the honest truth be told, you cannot but confess the latter to be the case. And therefore to plead this in excuse for not coming to Christ, is to act in direct opposition to the admonitions of your conscience. The true reason why you do not embrace the Redeemer, is not so much because you *cannot*, as because you *will not*. For were ye willing, your *inability*, so far from being considered as an exculpation, would operate as the strongest motive to urge you to go to God, in the use of all the appointed means, by prayer and supplication for him to lay on you his omnipotent hand.

5. There are, lastly, others who go a step farther, and say,—We conceive the fault is not chargeable to our *wills*, we feel our *hearts* to be inclined to engage in the service of God. It is our most exalted privilege. But in truth we *cannot*. We use the means, but we make no progress, and remain what we were.

Ah friends! consider but for a moment. You assert that you make use of the means: but in what manner? for it is not a matter of indifference how they are used. Perhaps you have used the means relying on your own strength, or depending wholly on the means, without looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of faith. You assert too, that you are

willing to engage in the service of the Eternal, but are *unable*. But is it a fact, that you are *willing*? In one respect it is: For it is agreeably to your will, to be put ultimately in possession of eternal felicity, but the way by which it may be obtained, meets not with your approbation. You are acting the part of a person who is indeed inclined to purchase a commodity which is exposed for sale, but is not pleased with the price which is demanded: in consequence of which the purchase is not completed. There are also some obstacles in your way: you cannot part with your beloved lusts: mountains rise up in succession before you, which you conceive cannot be surmounted; and so many bands attach you to the world, that you come to no firm determination to leave all and follow Christ. Experience frequently teaches us, that men under conviction, even with tears, may confess that they are willing to serve God, who, at the same time, were the secret recesses of their souls scrutinized, would manifest, that lusts remained to which they still adhered. They will indeed serve God, but with equal diligence, and with like ardour and zeal, they are inclined to serve the world, and hence continue to be what they always were. Is this your case? In faithfulness we must declare, that whatever you may assert to the contrary, your professions of being willing to accept of Jesus are insincere. God demands the whole heart.

And ye who are *sensible* that this is your situation, is it your wish to be directed to the means which persons, placed under circumstances like yours, ought to use? We are prepared to point them out, whilst we lift up our eyes to the hills from whence help only cometh, that by the humble use of them, the Lord would be pleased to manifest his grace to your souls.

There are SOME things which you must PRACTISE, and OTHERS against which you are to WATCH, and to be careful to avoid.

1. The *means* which are to be employed, are the following.

A. *Diligently attend on those places where in faithfulness the word is preached.* There ye are not only taught the truth, but constantly excited to seek the things which are connected with your everlasting peace. God hath promised to bless the preaching of the word. Language cannot express how much *they* lose, who improve not this appointed mean of grace, especially when God causes their hearts to be moved and alarmed at the discovery of the dreadful nature and effects of sin. As frequently as your circumstances in life will permit, attend on the public ministrations of the word: but be not impressed with the idea, that a constant attendance at church is sufficient, even though you were far more exemplary than others in this respect. For even a practice so laudable, may lay a foundation for fatal security, and produce the habit of indifferency and unconcern. If ye expect the blessing to depend on your using this excellent mean, and look not to God in Christ, who is pleased to *honor* it by working with it, your advantage will not really be promoted, your state will not be improved. Are you inclined to wait on God in the use of this instituted mean, with actual profit to yourselves? Then depart not from the places of your abode, previous to your having retired to some secret place; though it be but for a few moments, and bowed the knee before your God. Should an opportunity be wanting even for this, let your hearts be raised to God in some such ejaculations as these: “ Lord, “ according to commandment, I am again about to

“enter thy house of prayer: I have gone thither so often without deriving any benefit, grant that the present may be the happy hour for thee to work: let some word reach my heart, which shall prove to be the seed of regeneration.” Being seated in the church, *lend* a listening ear to what is spoken; and consider it not *to be the word of man*, but as it is in truth, the word of God. When the minister elevates his heart and his voice to the throne, and wrestles with God for the conversion of sinners, unite your petitions with those which he puts up, and humbly solicit him for this inestimable blessing, who hath promised so often in his word to dispense it, especially to those who enquire of him, to bestow it. Are *divine* truths explained and applied? Treasure them in your hearts, you will frequently have such elucidated as are suitable to your own case. Consider them not so much to be applicable to others, as to yourself. A conduct of this kind may become instrumental of producing genuine contrition, and that humility on which the Scriptures so abundantly insist. Is divine service ended, and have you returned to your respective places of abode? again present yourselves before God, and after this manner address his glorious majesty: “Lord, I have already so long been lying at the pool of Bethesda, and am equally miserable, let thy Holy Spirit cause my heart to be troubled, that I may seek to be made whole of whatsoever I am afflicted. Let this word sensibly affect my heart.” Who can tell what a sovereign God may do, if you observe a conduct which is so reasonable in itself, and for which you have a divine warrant?

B. *Be engaged as much as in you lies, in searching the scriptures, and in the investigation of those doc-*

trines which have an immediate respect to your eternal salvation. Let those books next to your bible be read most which treat of the great subjects of conversion, regeneration and faith, subjects which not only are the best calculated to bring convictions to the mind, to awaken the conscience and to give the soul a proper bias; but with which we must be experimentally acquainted if ever we be saved. God also works faith in the heart by means of reading his word; an instance of this is recorded in the 8th chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. When Philip ran, at the command of the Spirit, to get an interview with the Eunuch, he saw the writings of Isaiah in his hand, and heard him reading his Evangelical predictions concerning the sufferings of the Messias.

C. Associate as much as you can without neglecting the calling in which God hath placed you, with pious and godly men. In the choice of those, however, great care and circumspection is required, for many profess piety and exhibit a form of godliness, who are strangers to the power of it; whose minds dwell at ease, and who lead careless lives; who, indeed, can speak with fluency on christian principles, but not from experience. To frequent the company of persons of this description may prove very prejudicial; it may serve to confirm you in an opinion which is entertained by the world, and strengthen a prejudice which many have imbibed, that all professions of religion are hypocritical and insincere; or it may have the fatal tendency of inducing a belief, that all that is requisite to constitute a man pious and godly, is an external profession. Therefore, in the choice of companions seek the most enlightened, tender and experienced christians. From such you may receive advice and direction which will comport with the word

of God ; but at the same time remember, that if even in those you discern deficiencies, you ought not to be struck with amazement, nor suffer your minds to be overtaken by prejudice ; reflect that all, even the best of God's children have to struggle against their inward corruptions, and often to wrestle with principalities and powers ; pass their failings by, and contemplate rather the graces which they exercise, that thereby an holy jealousy may be excited.

And by the way, we would remark, CHILDREN OF GOD, how necessary is it, that in our walk and conversation, we deport ourselves with tenderness, circumspection and faithfulness, that we give no occasion of offence to natural men. We are a *City* set upon a hill ; the eyes of all are upon us, and if the world can but discover any thing in our conduct which comports not with our profession, they are confirmed in the prejudices which they have formed against vital religion ; let us then narrowly watch over all our actions, that we be not an obstacle in the way of any ; let us come out boldly for God and his cause, and by exhibiting in our lives the service of the Redeemer in all its charms, seek to engage others to enlist under his banners. And if God in his providence, bring in our way any of those whom we have just addressed, let our speech favour of FAITHFULNESS, but not of severity ; let us evidence a friendly disposition towards them, and satisfy them that our souls sincerely pity them, and that we are inclined to promote, as far as we can, their present and future blifs.

D. But as every mean, without the *blessing* of God, will be fruitless, we *counsel* you to be much exercised in PRAYER. We are aware that you are ready to object, “ *I cannot possibly use this mean of grace, for an*

“*unconverted sinner cannot pray, and besides, God hears not sinners.*”

This is undoubtedly the fact; God does not hear sinners when they pray, and are in *full purpose of heart to abide in sin*; but do they cry unto him to be converted, and to experience a spiritual change? With such petitions “he is well pleased;” therefore “Peter said to Simon the Sorcerer, pray God, perhaps the thoughts of thine heart may be forgiven thee,” Acts 8, 22. Cast yourselves then again and again at the feet of the Lord Jesus, as creatures who are plunged into the utmost depths of misery, and who have no strength to extricate themselves from a situation so wretched. And whilst you deplore your unhappy state, intreat him to look upon you with the eye of pity, and bestow the blessings of his covenant.

2. But are these the means which should be employed that you may become partakers of faith? Suffer us also to observe that you must be on *your guard*, and continually *watch* against those things which may prove an impediment in the way of obtaining a *benefit*, without which the salvation which the gospel proposes can never be enjoyed. And,

A. When God by the preaching of his word, by reading or by any other means, addresses himself in such a manner to your consciences, that convictions are wrought on your minds, and distress overwhelm your souls, *Be careful not to extinguish that light*, not to stifle those convictions; for you know not whether they be the common convictions of conscience, or whether in this way the *Eternal* is commencing a work of grace in your hearts; at any rate every attempt to quench them is dangerous. It may produce this dreadful effect:—That God strive with you no longer, and give you over to a total insensibility.

B. When you feel your hearts in any respect awakened, to cleave to that which is good, and warned to flee from impious and sinful ways; **CHERISH** those emotions, and beware of making the least resistance; it is possible they may have proceeded from the Holy Spirit. There is cause of fearing that many an instance occurs, of persons having been convicted of sin, who, contrary to the admonitions of their consciences, have devoted themselves again to the pleasures of the world, and sought with avidity the company of those whose minds are altogether absorbed by the things of time and sense. The effect of such a course is truly alarming; all those serious impressions may thereby be removed, and the soul be in the greatest danger of becoming hardened in iniquity. Besides, what conduct can be more sinful? They do despite to the spirit of grace, and treat his kind and gracious intimations with contempt. Hence he is frequently induced at last to withdraw himself, and leave them to perish in their sins. How dreadful will be the reflections of such in hell! How awful to recollect that at such a time, under such a sermon, or by such a providence, God knocked at the doors of their hearts, but that they opened not, but launched out into all the pleasures of the world; and that now it is too late to repent, the day of mercy being passed for ever.

If, sinners, you would avoid these bitter reflections; be persuaded, when you experience inward excitations to religion, and admonitions to leave the pursuits of vice, to go directly to God in prayer; and when in his presence earnestly plead—"That both
"may end in the saving conversion of your immortal
"souls."

C. Watch against, and by no means give way to

those thoughts and impressions which tend to discourage, and lead the mind to despondency, and may incline you to reason on this wise :—" My convictions have endured so long, and I have experienced nothing more than convictions ; my sins are too great to be forgiven." To embrace sentiments so desponding, Satan would persuade you, with a view of making you altogether discouraged, and of producing an indifferency with respect to the great interests of your souls. But, sinners, suffer not such *suggestions* to find a place in your hearts, for whilst there is life there is hope in your end. The sick man had lain at the pool of Bethesda *thirty-eight years*, and at the expiration of that period Jesus *healed* him. And, although your sins be of a scarlet colour and of a crimson dye, nay, though you had made yourselves like Satan himself, abominable in sinning, the mercy and compassion of God far surpasses your iniquities ; so that he both *will* and *can* forgive them. Never, then, indulge the thought, that now you are lost for ever ; but persevere in seeking God in Christ until he receive you in mercy, and you hear his voice utter the delightful declaration—*I, even I, am he that blotteth out all your sins for my name's sake.*

But let us now proceed to the *third* thing which we proposed for consideration ; which more properly respects the children of God who have already experienced grace in their hearts, and in whom faith, as to its first principles, has been wrought. They must be encouraged and excited to perseverance in that *Faith* of which they are partakers.

Come then, *Believer* ! who hast gone to Jesus with all thy burdens, but who art still filled with sore distress, because thou art in doubt whether thou hast in reality taken refuge beneath the shadow of his

wings—thou art poor and needy in thine own eyes ; but still thou art *rich* in Christ. In the present lecture we shall not enlarge much on the sources from which thine encouragement may be drawn ; as these in a succeeding lecture will be discussed at considerable length. At present we can only urge thee calmly and seriously to make the interesting enquiry—“ What has been thy former, and what is thy present experience ? ” I demand of thee,

1. Whether thou dar’st deny that the light which is enkindled in thy soul, be not essentially different from that, which persons yet in a state of nature, yea, which even those experience, who have a temporary faith ? Are not thine exercises and affections unlike what they were, when yet thou livedst in sin ? Dost thou not see the truths of the gospel in a manner quite the reverse from that in which thou beheldest them at that period ? Wouldst thou not express thy gratitude to God, if thou wert to see in any of thy friends or acquaintance, what thou discernest in thyself ?

2. Wilt thou presume to deny that the discovery which thou hast made of thy lost and deplorable state by nature, has filled thee with distress and anguish ?

3. Hast thou never had some views of thy need of Christ, and of his loveliness and preciousness ? Has he never been precious to thy soul ?

4. Wilt thou dare assert, that thou hast never gone out of thyself and fled to Jesus, as thy only refuge ?—Yea, and that thou wouldst not even now fly to him if thou wert able, and mightest presume so much ? Is not thy heart disposed, and in every respect willing to surrender thyself altogether to him ?

5. Wilt thou deny, that thine affections are placed on different objects from what they once were ?

Have not *sin*, the *world*, and *self-love*, become thine *enemies*? Is not *God*—Is not *Christ*—Are not *all who are born of God*, the objects of thy *love* and *esteem*? Now who hath wrought all these things in thee? Are they not the beginnings of faith? Give then, *God*, the glory, and be no more *faithless* but *believing*.

But it is not enough to have the first principles only, but as much as in thee lies it behoves thee to seek to *preserve* in lively exercise, and to increase in this divine and saving grace. To evince this, we propose in this place

1. To shew how *necessary* it is for the people of God to seek to *keep alive* the faith they once have received.

2. That it is their duty to endeavour to *grow and increase* in faith.

3. We shall then point out some *means* by the use of which they may succeed in a matter of such magnitude and importance.

In respect to the *first* particular, it must be previously remarked, that when we assert “That the people of God must seek to preserve faith in lively exercise,” we would be rightly understood.—It is not our intention to insinuate, that it is possible for them to fall *totally* and *finally* from a state of grace; for a sentiment of this nature militates in every point of view against the word of God, which maintains and inculcates that, *The gifts and calling of God are without repentance*. The love wherewith God loves his people is an EVERLASTING LOVE. Jer. 31, 3. In that heart wherein God hath implanted the seed of faith, it will abide forever; no enemy can root it out: This appears from those examples which scripture records of saints who had fallen into sin.

David prayed, Psalm 51, that *God would not take his holy spirit from him*; a clear proof that though he had fallen into gross sins, the *spirit* had not departed from him. Peter had denied his Lord, yet it is said Christ *prayed for him that his faith fail not*. Luke 22, 23. And it certainly was done to him, agreeably to the Saviour's petition, *for the Father heareth the Son always*, consequently the seed of faith must abide in the heart. Christ, indeed, speaks, Matt. 13. 21. of a faith which *endureth for a time*; but he cannot be understood to refer to true faith, for he immediately adds, *it hath no root*.

But though the seed of faith remain in the heart, still it may decline, and become weaker in its exercises, insomuch that the soul may resemble the season of winter, when neither *leaves*, nor *blossoms*, nor *fruit* are seen.

Yea, faith also often lessens as to its *degrees*. The soul that at the commencement of the work of grace was ALL engagedness, ALL life and ALL activity, so that it with confidence relied upon the promises of God, and dared to attempt great things, afterwards feels its zeal and ardor often diminished, and its confidence weakened; it is agitated by doubts, and tossed as by a tempest, through the prevalence of unbelief; in consequence of all which, but little fruit is produced and evidenced in the christian's walk. Against all this believers must be upon their GUARD, and seek thus to *preserve* that *faith* which God hath wrought in them.

1. To this duty, God, in his word, constantly EXHORTS his people, 1. Cor. 16. 13. *Stand fast in the faith*. Rev. 3. 10. *Hold fast what thou hast, that no man take thy crown*.

2. God has CONNECTED in the closest manner the *preservation* of faith on his part, and the *preservation*

of it *by the believer*. God preserves the life of grace WITHOUT THE USE OF MEANS, BY AN EXERTION OF HIS ALMIGHTY POWER, but the believer preserves it BY A DILIGENT USE OF MEANS; both of which are as intimately connected together, and as necessary as eating and drinking are for preserving the vigor of the body and natural life. This we are taught by Peter, 1. Epist. i. 5. *Ye are kept by the power of God*. But by what means? *Through faith*. Therefore the apostle John observes 1. Epist. v. 18. *He that is begotten of God KEEPETH himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not*.

3. There is nothing which is more subject to be assaulted than faith. The *enemy* falls upon the believer, and engages with the fierceness of a fiend, to destroy him; hence every child of God should watch with peculiar care, and be ever on his guard to *preserve* this principle entire.

4. Faith is the *shield* which the christian must use in the spiritual *warfare*, to enable him to stand his ground whenever attacked, and therefore it is above all things necessary that he preserve this shield as his chief weapon, without which he cannot conquer, but must fall before his hateful foes.

But, *Secondly*, It is not enough that believers maintain and preserve faith. It behoves them to endeavour to GROW and to PROGRESS in this *grace*. To this God's people are continually exhorted. Peter says, 2 Epist. iii. 18. *Increase in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ*. And again, 1 Pet. ii. 2. *As new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby*. Paul, addressing the Hebrews, chap. vi. 1, says, *Let us go on to perfection*. Christians must from *children* become *young men*, and from *young men* aim at being made *fathers in Christ*,

1 John ii. 13, 14. They must not always remain *BRUISED REEDS*; it behoves them to aspire at the *tallness* and *sturdiness* of the *cedar* and *oak*. They must grow up *as calves before the stall*, Matt. iv. 2. According to the promise, Psalm xcii. 14, *Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God*. They must be like *eagles*, and *renew their strength*, Isai. xl. 31, like the *horses in Pharaoh's chariot*, Songs i. 9, and the *goodly horse of God's majesty in the day of battle*, Zach. x. 3. They must, *giving all diligence, add to their faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity*. What are we to infer from all these passages, if not that the believer is bound to progress in the divine life, and proceed from one degree of faith to another? Therefore he must

1. Increase in knowledge. It is not becoming, that like a *babe*, and *one unskilful in the word of righteousness*, he continue in the use of *milk*, *or the first principles of the oracles of God*, Heb. v. 12. It behoves him to go on *to perfection*, and endeavour to attain to a more extensive knowledge of the mysteries and depths which the scriptures record, to the end that he may have more glorious views of the *WISDOM OF GOD*. In a word, he ought especially to aim at arriving at a clear, distinct, and experimental knowledge of the whole *plan of salvation; of the mediator of the covenant in all his excellencies; of the Spirit and his operations; and of the obligations which he is under to the practice of piety*.

2. It is incumbent on the believer to *advance in yielding a cordial assent to the truth*. This he is said to do, *when by means of an accurate spirit of discern-*

ment, he discovers what is *good* or *evil*, *true* or *false*; and dissents from the *latter*, but approves of the *former*; *when* experiencing the *sweetness* and *force* of truth on his heart, the Spirit *witnesses* that the Spirit is truth; and *when*, meeting with those doctrines which are deep and mysterious, and which he is unable to develope, he still *embraces* and *admires* them, because GOD hath revealed them.

3. The believer must progress CONSTANTLY in making Jesus his hiding-place, and in taking refuge beneath the shadow of his wings; that is, it behoves him on every *occasion* which offers, and under all circumstances of his life, to fly to his Redeemer with an increased degree of cordiality and composedness, and with a heart exercising a greater degree of confidence in his power and grace, and determined to persevere in seeking him with more engagedness than ever, as his only asylum. And this must be done, not only when he has *backslidden* from the ways of the Lord, to the end that he may obtain *reconciliation* and *pardon* by his blood; but when his soul is *exercised* by doubts or is greatly *embarrassed*; or filled with *gross darkness*, and sensible of its *own weakness*; that thereby he may obtain *counsel*, *light*, *strength*.

4. A Christian must increase in the exercise of CONFIDENCE. It is not sufficient that he *exercise that faith* by which the soul barely TAKES REFUGE BENEATH THE SHADOW OF CHRIST'S WINGS; which, though genuine, yet is subject frequently to BE AGITATED; by which he durst not *repose himself upon God*, *apply* the promises, and is so easily *intimidated* in seasons of distress. No: If he will attain to *peace* and *joy in believing*, and experience increased *consolations*, it is necessary that he seek so to increase in faith, that he attain to an ASSURED FAITH which

enables its possessor to *maintain* his ground when assaulted by temptation, to *rely* upon the divine promises, and to *trust* his *salvation* and all his concerns into the hands of his God.

Now whenever the Christian progresses in either of these respects, he may be considered as making advances in the *divine life* of faith.

But to the end that he may thus go on, and advance in the *Christian race*, we must in the THIRD PLACE, direct to the MEANS which every believer ought to pursue.

1. We cannot present to his view, or direct to a more *effectual mean*, in order to his advancement in faith, than the READING, SEARCHING, and HEARING of the word of God. For that same *word* which is the SEED of regeneration, is the MILK whereby the Christian grows. By means of it the understanding becomes more enlightened, and consequently the sphere of his knowledge more enlarged. It is the word of God in the hands of the spirit which excites the dull, the sluggish, and inactive heart of the believer to *love* and be charmed with divine truth.

“ O then, prize the word, read it again and again
“ when retired to thy closet, and in secret with thy
“ God. It is the *New-Testament* of thy Father, in
“ which thou wilt find thy name written. Whenever
“ thou meditatest on the interesting truths which it
“ contains, let thy soul *delight* in them. Attend to
“ the duties which it inculcates, and often frequent
“ those places where its doctrines are publicly taught.
“ It is impossible for the tongue to express the loss
“ which thou dost sustain by reason of a frequent and
“ *unnecessary* abstinence from the public ordinances
“ of religion. By not attending to the truths which
“ our Bibles record, and by departing from the hear-

“ ing of faith, *leannefs* is brought on the foul ; whilst
 “ a different conduct, and such as we here prescribe,
 “ tends to *strengthen* and *confirm* that divine princi-
 “ ple which God hath wrought in thy heart. Cleave
 “ then to the word, and let the Scriptures be daily
 “ searched by thee.”

2. In order to a believer's progressing in faith, TO
 USE THE SACRAMENTS IN A RIGHT AND BE-
 COMING MANNER, is particularly advantageous.

In respect to *Baptism*, the question may be asked,
 How can IT tend to the advancement of faith ? for
 “ I have received it but once, and that at a time
 “ when destitute of knowledge and consciousness,
 “ how must I then improve it to my advantage ?

It is true thou hast been but once baptized, and
 that too in thine infancy : but still when thou consid-
 erest properly the nature of that sacrament, it may
 contribute to thy profit, especially when thou art ena-
 bled to make the following reflections, viz. “ That
 “ when I was an infant I was sprinkled with baptis-
 “ mal water, and thus offered to a Triune God ; that
 “ on that solemn occasion, God the FATHER virtu-
 “ ally declared that he was willing to make with me
 “ an everlasting covenant of grace ; God the SON,
 “ that he was disposed to wash me in his blood ; and
 “ God the HOLY GHOST, that agreeably to the di-
 “ vine constitution he would dwell in me, and sancti-
 “ fy me to be a member of Christ. And as my pa-
 “ rents have consented to that covenant in my room,
 “ and I arriving at years of discretion, have taken
 “ upon myself the promises which they made for me,
 “ am I not under *obligations* the most pressing, to ob-
 “ serve a conversation which shall be marked by pic-
 “ ty, and to lead a life which shall evidence, that my

“ highest object is to advance the glory of God, and
“ my precious Redeemer’s name ?”

“ Yes, if thou wert in the presence of the Lord,
and before thy God, frequently to enquire—“ Have I
“ also received the things which are signified by bap-
“ tism? Have I been washed in Jesus’ blood? and
“ can I thereby exercise *the answer of a good con-*
“ *science towards God*, and as a covenant God ask
“ of him all things whereof I have need, to make me
“ advance in the divine life?” Thou wouldst expe-
rience then, that thy *confidence* would be more ex-
cited, and consequently that thy *faith* would be more
strengthened and confirmed.

In like manner, the sacrament of the Lord’s sup-
per, if it be properly used, greatly contributes as a
mean to increase faith, and support and strengthen
that life which divine grace hath caused to spring up
in thee. By a due attendance upon God in this or-
dinance, the *understanding* becomes more enlightened,
and attains to higher degrees in the knowledge of di-
vine truths, especially of those that appertain to the
work of salvation. For they are exhibited to the eye
of faith, in the *sacrament*, as in a *picture* which is
drawn to the life. By the Lord’s supper, as a mean
excellently adapted to the purpose, *strong desires* af-
ter the Lord Jesus are raised and excited. For when
the believer contemplates the love of the Redeemer,
as there it is set forth, transcending all bounds, he
cannot but feel himself obligated to make some re-
turns of love, and by faith to fly to his embrace.
And may we not add, that the Lord’s supper is ad-
mirably adapted to establish the *confidence* of the
child of God? Certainly: For God puts as it were
into the hands of every believing communicant the
seals of his love and faithfulness; in virtue of which

he may be assured, that he will make all his promises *yea and amen*.

3. There is still another valuable mean of increasing in faith, PRAYER. Than this there is no duty in the discharge of which faith can be more or better exercised. *All* that the christian brings before his God, all the desires he presents at a Throne of Grace, are brought and presented by and in faith. *Prayer* is the breath of spiritual life; by earnest prayer the soul holds the most intimate communion with God. In the act of Prayer, it *flies* and *runs* from itself unto God and Christ, *casts* itself into his arms, and *confides* in him as its covenant God and Mediator. O! Christian, if to pray with earnestness and perseverance be so beneficial, practise this duty. It is cause of lamentation that thou art not more engaged when thou appearest in prayer in the presence of the Divine Majesty, and that thy heart oftentimes is in a *frame* remarkable for its *dulness* and *stupidity*. If thy faith be weak, this consideration should urge thee to the Throne of Grace, and encourage thee to cry with the disciples, *Lord increase our faith*, Luke 17. 5. Art thou oppressed with unbelief? Thou hast in such case so much the more reason to exclaim in the language of that father, *who cried out and said with tears, Lord, I believe, help mine unbelief*, Mark 9. 24. In this way thy faith would be far more increased than if, by distrusting God and giving way to doubts and fears, thou shouldst keep at a distance from him, and neglect a duty which is calculated as a mean to make thee advance far in faith.

4. If thou wouldst increase in faith, it stands thee in hand very frequently to PROVE and TRY it, not only thereby to become assured of its being *genuine*, but with a view also of discovering whether, *in any re-*

spect, and *how far* thou hast already advanced therein. This, on the *one hand*, would serve to produce a sense of shame, and cause thee to be abased to the lowest degree, upon discovering how small thy attainments have been, and at the same time excite in thee an holy ardor to make greater progress, and to press forward in the christian course ; or if, upon examination, it be found that there exists any breach or difference between thee and thy God, in such case thou wouldst be prompted immediately to return to him, which would be attended with the happy effect both of *preventing* thy confidence from being shaken, and of *keeping* thee nearer to thy God. But on the other hand, if, by such an investigation, it shall appear that thou hast in any respect progressed in the life of faith, gratitude would be enkindled in thy soul, and thou wouldst be excited to greater zeal in his service, who hath bestowed such inestimable benefits upon thee.

O, believe it to be a truth, that one of the greatest reasons why thine attainments have been so small is, that thou hast so little concern with respect to the situation of thine heart, and art so great a stranger to its various workings, and to what is passing within. Besides, by want of attention to this, thou dost become in a certain degree estranged from the Lord, and what is truly awful, thy graces, which ought constantly to be in exercise, lie dormant and inactive.

5. ASSOCIATE much with those tender Christians who live near to the Lord ; thou wilt derive this great advantage from it, that thy LOVE will be enkindled into a flame, and thy soul burn with ardent zeal to engage in all good works. We have not language to express how much mutual and frequent intercourse among Christians, tends to the increase of *knowledge*

and to the advancement of faith. Hath one believer made farther progress than another? In such case *the hands which hang down*, and the *knees which are feeble are lifted up*, and the soul as it were inspirited of anew, is excited to come out more boldly in the service of his Creator and Redeemer, God.

6. Be on thy guard, and watch with singular care against whatever may hinder thy growth and progress in faith.

A. ARM THYSELF against the assaults of Satan, and those fiery darts which he shoots with a view of making thee to doubt with respect to the reality of thy faith, and even of that religion which thou professest to be divine. This adversary SOMETIMES will endeavor to sap those essential doctrines which constitute the very foundation on which thy faith is built; at such times, *take the sword of the Spirit, the word of God*, to ward off the deadly blow, Eph. 6. 17. and say with Christ, Matt. 4. 4. *Thus it is written*, for thou art never in greater danger from his assaults than when thou art off thy guard, and layest down the weapon with which Christ hath furnished thee. AT OTHER TIMES, as was hinted, he will seek to make thy soul doubt whether thy faith has ever been *sincere*, and then especially when it is weakest and not in a situation to enter the lists with him. When thus assaulted give not away in the least to distrust and to doubts for which thou hast no ground, lest, by that mean, Satan gain an advantage over thee, and thy growth in faith be obstructed; for as long as thou art employed in laying the foundation, the building cannot rise. If thou art constantly digging about the root to see whether the tree has life, the tree is impeded in its growth; the best evidence of the life of trees is their sprouting into leaves and branches, and bear-

ing fruit. Seek, therefore, by bringing forth much fruit, to evidence to thyself when thus tempted, that thou *abideſt in Chriſt and he in thee*. Luke xv.

B. ARM THYSELF, and be upon the WATCH againſt the WORLD; they often will ſeek to turn thy hope into ridicule, and deride thy religion, eſpecially if thou art oppreſſed with adverſity and overwhelmed with any diſtreſs; their language then will be, “What *we* enjoy is certain; *we* already poſſeſs that which is good; we have *no bands*, “but all that thou canſt boaſt of is *future*; thou haſt it only in expectation; it is ideal and ſpeculative. Who can tell whether, after all thy waiting, the expected bleſſing will ever arrive? And “in the mean time thou art plagued all the day long.” No perſon can fully conceive in what danger thou art from the world to have thy faith *ſhaken*; even Aſaph himſelf, was beginning to doubt and deſpond, when he contemplated the *proſperity* of the *wicked*, and ſaw the *righteous* and the *godly* filled with ſore *diſtreſs*, and borne down beneath the preſſure of ſome heavy load. He ſaid, Pſalm lxxiii. 13. *Verily, I have cleaned my heart in vain, and waſhed my hands in innocency*. But believer, be not ſatiſfied with an external view of the ſtate and condition of the children of God; with Aſaph *enter into the ſanctuary of the Lord*, to underſtand the different end of the *wicked*, and of *thoſe who fear the Lord*, that thereby thou mayeſt learn to deſpiſe and become ſuperior to the contempt of the world, and the deriſion with which its votaries treat thee.

7. Laſtly, endeavour to *exerciſe faith daily*. Often look unto the Lord Jeſus, and ſeek to obtain faith’s views of his fulneſs; reflect frequently on thy deficiencies and imperfections, and conſtantly flee from thyſelf and run to embrace him, as the fountain from

which issues all the streams of salvation. Pursuing a course of this nature, thou wilt find thy faith to *grow*, and thy hope to be CONFIRMED, strengthened and established.

Thus we have laid before you the nature of faith, and exhibited the means by which it both may be *obtained* and *preserved* by the divine blessing ; let us now endeavour briefly to improve what has been spoken.

1. What is thy situation, IGNORANT AND UNCONCERNED SINNER ? Thou art about TO APPROACH the TABLE of the Lord, but hast never examined thyself, whether thou hast faith or any interest in Christ ; thou art unacquainted with the nature of thy misery ; thou hast no feeling sense of being wretched, poor and blind, and naked ; thou art going on carelessly, fearless and insensible of the danger which is impending over thy head. Truly, thou art an object to be pitied, for thou mayest be likened to one sleeping on the top of a mast when the ship is tossed by the raging billows, who is liable every moment to be *hurled* into the ocean, and *lost for ever*.

2. And thou, WORLDLY-MINDED sinner, unto this day thou art destitute of saving faith ; for both *thine eye* and *thine heart* are so strangely fixed on and infatuated with the glittering appearances and vanities of the world, that thou seest no charms, no comeliness in Jesus. Although he be exhibited unto thee as the *chief of ten thousand*, and *altogether lovely*, thou desirest him not ! On things of time thine affections are supremely placed. Would to God, that thine understanding were but enlightened, on the one hand that thou mightest behold the folly of having thine heart cleave unto the earth, and on the other, discern the preciousness of glorious Christ ; then wouldst thou entertain sentiments with respect to the world, vastly

different from what thou dost at present; then, not the world, but Christ would be the object of thy choice, and whom thou wouldst delight to serve.

3. There are others WHO HAVE NEVER TIME TO ENTER UPON AN EXAMINATION WHETHER THEY ARE IN THE FAITH OR NOT. They are so deeply immersed in the cares and employments of a temporal nature, and so anxiously concerned what they shall eat, what they shall drink, and how they shall come through the world, that whether *alone* or in company these things absorb their mind and engross their whole attention.

Whoever thou art whose character corresponds with the above description, thou art truly to be pitied. To gratify thee, it might be wished that thou hadst a larger portion on earth; but canst thou, with all thy labour, toil, anxiety, increase thy substance, if the Eternal blest not the work of thy hands? Besides, art thou acting a part which is reasonable, to be forever concerned for the body, whilst thy soul is in a situation infinitely more wretched and deplorable, as long as it is out of Christ, and without faith? Thy body will soon crumble into dust and become the prey of worms, but thy soul will exist throughout all eternity. O! that this consideration might affect thy heart, and be a mean in the hand of God to awaken thee to be duly concerned for its welfare.

4. There are others again who are convinced THAT THEY ARE STILL DESTITUTE OF FAITH, who are aware that they have no interest in Jesus; who, although at times they may secretly wish it were the case, yet do nothing but wish, and SUFFER the world and sin to reign over them, and lead them captives at their pleasure, and by thus acting become more remote from *the way* which leads the soul to

faith, to God, to eternal happiness. What *situation* can be more dangerous ! What condition more wretched !

Is there an individual of this description that now is asking for counsel and advice in his case ? Does he demand an answer to that most important of all questions ? what shall I do to become a partaker of faith ? Do this :

1. Endeavour to have this truth deeply impressed on thy mind, that to live and to die without faith in Christ will render thee most wretched, and will accumulate upon thee such a load of misery as thou must for ever sink under, seeing THOU hast enjoyed the *free* and the full offers of grace and salvation. *How shalt thou escape if thou neglectest so great salvation ?*

2. When thou dost observe God to work with his Spirit upon the heart of any person, *take good heed that thou despise it not ;* that thou treat it not with contempt. Wert thou to act such a part, thou wouldst erect a *bulwark* against conviction. Rather say to thyself when thou seest the grace of God abounding in this way to other sinners, “ This work must be wrought “ in me if I am ever happy ; would to God that I “ experienced the same.”

3. Be not at rest, whilst thou hast reason to conclude that thou art not a possessor of true and saving faith. God usually produces this divine principle in the use of the means which he hath appointed ; Be, therefore, diligent in using those means, and especially observe a constant attendance on the preaching of that gospel which Jesus has promulgated, which is the power of God unto salvation, and by which the seed of faith is implanted in the soul.

4. If the Spirit of God in any respect commences his operations on thy heart, though they be but

common convictions and awakenings of thy conscience, *quench* them not ; let them make a due impression ; it is impossible for thee to tell how very injurious it may be to thee to resist them. Is it not from hence that *hardness of heart*, and a *total insensibility* proceed, than which there is no situation into which a person can come that is more awful or dangerous ?

But where is the child of God ? We cannot conclude this lecture without dropping a few words to thee.

Wherefore art THOU always so troubled, disquieted and distressed, especially about that time when the Lord's Supper is to be administered ? Thou art filled with fear lest thy faith be not genuine, and because thou findest so many corruptions yet remaining ; thou art saying, " If I were really a person who had faith, " my heart would have been more purified, and I " should have lived more tenderly before God." But let not thy *heart be troubled*, thou hast great reason to be encouraged.

1. Has Satan, sin, and the flesh, in thine opinion, gained a victory ? Grant it. Art thou saying, " yes, " so sinful am I, and more so than I am able to describe." Grant it. Is not thy Redeemer mighty ? Can power be wanting in thy Jesus to help thee and rescue thee from these thine enemies ?

2. Consider what a free offer of grace and salvation is made unto sinners in the gospel ; this, certainly, should remove every fear, and ought to banish from thy mind every desponding thought ; for, does not that precious word assure thee, that however *unworthy* thou mayest be, and however *abominable* thou mayest appear in thine own eyes, from the view thou hast gotten of the holy nature of thy God, and of the

evil of sin, yet thou art WELCOME to approach the Saviour; yea, by coming to him as the vilest of the vile, thou dost actually place a CROWN upon his head. There is nothing to hinder thine obtaining salvation from him but thine own UNWILLINGNESS, and therefore though SATAN may throw obstacles in thy way, and fill thee with fear, let him not gain his point; the more violent his assaults are, do thou with a more accelerated motion run to him, and hide thyself beneath the shadow of his wings.

4. Thou art invited to the *Marriage Supper of the Lamb*, to eat and to drink in his presence; let no consideration, no difficulty whatever, induce thee not to accept of the gracious invitation of thy Lord, or keep thee from his table; for not to approach argues the prevalence of unbelief, and is to disobey thy God, to cast contempt upon thy Saviour, and to work in the hands of thine enemies. Besides, by slighting this ordinance and keeping from it, thou wilt lose still more of thy peace and joy in believing than thou hast already, and that which ought to have its due weight is this, that thou knowest not what blessing, what love-visit, what refreshment thy soul might enjoy by complying with this thy Saviour's dying command.—Wherefore, then, wilt thou keep thyself away? Cast thyself into Jesus' arms, venture thy soul upon him; he will meet thee in love. It is granted that thy faith is weak; Is not a weak faith a faith which is true and genuine? It is granted that thou art compelled to cry with tears, *Lord! help mine unbelief*. Those TEARS are agreeable to Jesus, and that CRY is the sweetest music in his ears.

Although what we have advanced must cover THEE with *shame*, CHILD OF GOD, who knowest with a greater degree of assurance than others that thou hast faith in

Christ, but at the same time hast made but little progress in the divine life, insomuch that when corruptions arise with their wonted strength, thy confidence is diminished and thy fears increased. *Nothing* that has been said was meant to discourage thee; the consideration of the small progress which thou hast made ought, indeed, to humble thee; but at the same time it should serve as a powerful motive to excite thee with lively faith to go to thy God again. Make, then, all thy complaints known to him; tell him how great a burden sin is to thee, and how desirous thou art to be freed from it; of anew *take refuge* in the wounds of Jesus, and seek reconciliation in his blood, which thou art particularly called upon to do in approaching the table of the Lord. Go to that ordinance, having thine heart exercised by faith, and fully purposing, through grace TO RENOUNCE SELF, the WORLD, and ALL that is opposed to God and godliness, and to LIVE more devoted to the service of thy God and Saviour; then wilt thou be welcomed by the great Master of the Feast, and in thine experience find THE SACRAMENT to be attended with a blessing to thy soul; which, may God of his infinite mercy grant, through Jesus Christ.

A M E N.



THE

PIOUS COMMUNICANT.

Lecture II.

ON THE GREAT DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A
TEMPORARY AND A TRUE AND SAVING
FAITH.

HAVING in the preceding Lecture treated of the NATURE of saving faith, we conceived it would be highly serviceable to address you at this time on the great and essential difference which exists between *that faith* which actually unites the soul with Christ, and thus leads to salvation, and *that* which we are accustomed to denominate *temporary*, which indeed ALMOST Christians may exercise, but which, however near a resemblance it may bear to it, yet is as far from it as *heaven* is from *earth*, and as *different* as are life and death, light and darkness. We were particularly induced to discuss this subject with a view, *on the one hand*, to discover to the *presumptuous* and the *secure sinner* before it be for ever too late, the danger to which he is exposed of being *deceived*, and to be instrumental in leading him from the devious paths of sin and delusion into those which terminate in his

everlasting happiness; and also, on the other hand, to administer comfort, support, and grounds of encouragement to the people of God, who so frequently are oppressed by fear, and filled with sore distress, lest the faith which they exercise be not true, real and saving.

To accomplish our design, we shall attempt

I. To shew that to ascertain with precision, whether a person be a temporary or true believer, is a work which is *most necessary*, and at the same time *most arduous*.

II. We shall then offer some observations on the term "Temporary Faith," and endeavour to make it appear that it not only DIFFERS in *name* but in *fact*, from saving faith.

III. We shall exhibit in a variety of points, wherein the ESSENTIAL DIFFERENCE lies between the *one* and the *other*.

IV. On the supposition that there may be present PERSONS whose faith is only temporary, and who, by what may be advanced in the course of this Lecture, may be led to see the danger which awaits them, and be alarmed at the dreadful prospect before them, we shall offer them some advice *what to do* in a SITUATION so truly deplorable.

V. We shall close the subject with an address unto true believers who are DISTRESSED concerning their *state and condition*, to the end that they may be encouraged to wait upon God at his table, and a divine blessing accompany their approach to it.

To ascertain with precision whether a person be a temporary or a true believer, is a work which at the same time that it is MOST NECESSARY, is also MOST ARDUOUS.

1. IT IS MOST NECESSARY, for

A. It is a point on which greatly depends both *life and death, salvation and damnation, everlasting happiness and eternal misery*; for a temporary faith, how far soever it may go, can go no farther than to make a person AN ALMOST Christian, and consequently not a Christian INDEED; for faith which is temporary does not bring the soul to enjoy *fellowship* with Christ, but genuine faith, how weak soever it may be, *unites* the soul with the Lord Jesus, and thus constitutes one really a Christian, and makes him as an heir, to expect on the best foundation, to be put in possession of the INHERITANCE which is held in reversion; ETERNAL LIFE and SALVATION.

B. *Temporary Faith* in many points greatly resembles that faith which is *true and saving*; wherefore, the person who has only a faith which is temporary, is with extreme difficulty convinced that he wants that genuine kind which *purifies the heart, works by love, overcomes the world, and is the gift of God*. The *sinner* who is openly profane, whose life and conversation is diametrically opposed to the law of God, may be convinced with much less difficulty that he needs *conversion* than the *almost Christian*; for the man bold in sin, cannot resort for shelter to this source: "That he is externally holy, and that in his whole deportment the strictest attention has been paid to moral duties." This, however, is the covert beneath which the *almost Christian* would screen himself; and such is his presumption, that if divested of one FIG LEAF he will have recourse to another to hide him not only from his God, but from himself. If, with precision and accuracy we would ascertain the true state and condition in which we are, a very nice and particular ASSAY must be made. The

refiner of GOLD finds it not necessary to bring LEAD, TIN and IRON to the touchstone, for these metals discover at first sight what their properties are ; but when SILVER and other METALS are melted into a mass, which makes the composition nearly resemble the *pure gold*, it is then proper to apply it to the STONE, that the quality of the compound may be discovered, and deception be prevented. In the very same manner we must act with respect to temporary faith, that it be distinguished from true and saving faith, to which it bears the most striking likeness ; it must be brought to the true touchstone, the WORD OF GOD, which can never deceive ; it must be examined with the most scrupulous exactness to the end, that the result of our labour may be, to *distinguish* that faith which is *true* from that which is *false* and delusory.

C. An investigation of this kind is not only attended with an advantage to the *temporary believer*, but also to *him* who possesses true faith ; for the former, as long as he enters not on the serious work of examination, goes on quietly and without concern, in the road which leads to everlasting misery ; he becomes more AT EASE in sin, and his danger of being RUINED FOR EVER is *daily* increased ; and in like manner, if the true believer be not *frequent* in *conversing* with his soul and in ascertaining its true state, he is in danger of continuing *long oppressed* by fear that *at best* his faith may be but of the temporary kind, and is thus deprived of the comfort and satisfaction which otherwise he would enjoy.

2. But is this investigation so *necessary* ? It is not less DIFFICULT, if we be faithful in the work ; for

A. In order to an accurate examination of ourselves, so as to be able to separate the GOOD in us from that which is EVIL, it is necessary that we calm-

ly and deliberately *enter within*, look at the heart, and see how things are *there* situated; for the *heart* is the *fountain* from whence all our actions proceed; hence it is denominated *self-examination* and the *consideration of ONE'S WAY*; Hagg. i. 5. *consider your ways*; and because this close examination of the heart is so absolutely necessary, the work is rendered so difficult; for on the one hand the *temporary* believer does not readily enter upon it, and in case he does, he runs through it with all possible speed; he does not *pry* into the *secret recesses* of his heart; his *external* actions only pass in review before him; and on the other hand, though the true believer engages much in self-examination in secret before his God, and delights to converse with his soul, yet he frequently meets with so much opposition that he makes but little progress.

B. The work of self-examination is difficult; for the temporary believer *only* surveying the *surface*, comes to a *good* conclusion with respect to his state, whilst the real Christian, experiencing so much of the *PLAGUES* of his heart, or in-dwelling sin, forms an opinion of his condition which is most unfavourable. The *one*, deluded by self-love, forces himself to believe that he is truly good, to prevent his soul from being overwhelmed and disquieted within him; the other, afraid lest he should deceive himself, deals with too much severity in judging of his case.

C. There is required in self-examination, in order that we may form a judgment which shall be according to truth; that we be aided by *THE ILLUMINATING INFLUENCES OF THE HOLY SPIRIT*. The temporary believer, destitute of this faithful guide, will be led too easily to conclude, that *he is a possessor* of that faith, *the end* of which is *the salvation*

of the soul; whilst the real Christian, who has indeed experienced his enlightening grace, and thereby attained to a knowledge of himself, having by sin grieved the Spirit, and thus caused him to withhold for a season that light which is so REFRESHING to the soul, is tempted to form an UNFAVOURABLE determination as to his STATE and CONDITION, if when unassisted by that celestial guide *who searches the deep things of God*, and whose immediate prerogative it is, *to convince of sin, of righteousness, and judgment*. He commences, and proceeds in the work of examining whether his heart be right with God, and whether of a truth he be in the faith.

D. SATAN, who is loth to lose ONE over whom he hath exercised any sway, and who is well aware that self-examination is the *most certain* way of discovering the *awful precipice* on which the *sinner* and the *hypocrite* are standing, and of exhibiting the DANGER both are in, of being led *captives at his will*, until eternal ruin be brought upon them, EXERTS *all his strength*, and employs every artifice to make them *at ease in their sins*, and consequently he is vigilant to keep them from engaging in the great work of *searching* their hearts. He excites them to attend with so much ardor to worldly pursuits, that *all* enquiry and concern respecting their souls are neglected. If at any time they retire for a season from the busy scenes with which they are conversant, he injects a thousand thoughts, which have an immediate tendency both to draw their hearts from God, to keep them from trying what spirits they are of, than which no one thing is more needful or beneficial. Do they experience *compunction*, or are they disquieted by an *accusing conscience*? he well knows what erroneous principles to instil, with a view of keeping them from

building on Christ, the only sure foundation. *And on the contrary*, although the adversary be aware, that he cannot *keep out of heaven* one soul that has true faith; yet being the sworn enemy of the people of God, he endeavours to make the *road* leading thither both *thorny* and *difficult*, and especially because much of their comfort depends on frequent and faithful examinations of their hearts. He exerts himself to the utmost, to prevent those in distress from entering upon it at all: and if they commence it, he excites such a degree of fear, that frequently they progress not, and are impeded in the important work.

E. It is a thing than which nothing is more arduous, to discover a temporary believer *to himself*: for he is incessantly reflecting on his external actions, as being pre-eminent, and sets the highest value upon them, because he is little concerned as to the manner of their being performed, to render them *acceptable* unto that God, who seeth *not as man* seeth, and *who is a searcher of the heart, and a trier of the reins of the children of men*. It is no uncommon thing for a person of this description thus to reason with himself: “I do all those things which are performed by *those* of whom the least doubt cannot be entertained but that they are God’s children. With earnestness and zeal I engage in the service of God. I associate with the pious; and when in their company make it a point to converse on the great doctrines of Christianity, and that too with such fervor and engagedness, that they class me among those who have felt the power of them on their hearts. I never indulge myself in the commission of outward acts of sin. *What lack I yet?*” Matt. xix. 20. Now since he builds his hopes of salvation on such foundations, and never looks into his heart at all, either

to discover the motives of his actions, or whether they be so performed that God can be pleased with them; it is a work which is difficult in the extreme to *convince* him of his error, and *divest* him of that pride to which corrupt nature is so prone. On the other hand, the true believer, although his conduct outwardly may correspond with his profession, and be such as the world viewing it with a scrutinizing eye, must pronounce to be *good*; yet because he is assured by the word, that wearing the external garb of Christianity, does not constitute a person a Christian indeed, but that it is necessary that the heart be right with God; he discovers that his *best* works, and even the most *holy duties* in which he engages, are polluted and defiled to that degree, that he is compelled often to reason with himself on this wise: “Can I presume to draw a favourable conclusion with respect to *my* state, whose actions resemble more the actions of one who is influenced by principles of nature, rather than of grace.” And thus it comes to pass, that the *nominal* Christian, by overvaluing his performances, cries PEACE, PEACE, *when there is no PEACE*; and the real child of God, by viewing his best works to be contaminated with sin, is brought to *doubt* whether his heart be right with God, and hath been purified by faith; a situation this, which is always accompanied with anxiety and distress. Hence to examine into our state, and to come to a definite conclusion with respect to it, is of all others a work truly arduous.

Our second subject of discussion was, to make some observations on the term *temporary faith*, and to demonstrate that it is essentially different from that which is *true* and *saving*.

What respects the NAME we find on record, Matt.

xiv. 5, compared with verse 20, 21, where Christ speaks of it under the idea of SEED *that was sown on stony ground*. For a season it indeed grew rapidly ; but because it had no *depth* of earth, it took not root, and thus by the intense heat of the sun, *withered away*. It is called temporary faith, because, agreeably to the idea of Christ, and the manner in which he applied the parable, it endured but *for a time*, and withered straightway before the *fire* of persecution and affliction.

But with equal propriety it may be denominated, as many have done, a FALSE OR IDEAL faith. For when Christ speaks of it, Matt. xiii. those days were represented as approaching, in which men would be called to suffer for the truth of the gospel, and then it would be manifest, when once the flame of persecution was enkindled, whether the *seed* had taken *deep root* in the heart, or whether it was only *sown* on stony ground, the corrupt heart of the natural man ; and consequently would not be able to exist, yea, must perish in times so perilous.

But in those seasons, when the gospel may be professed, and there be nothing to fear from the *sword* of the persecutor, or the *sneers* and *malevolence* of the infidel ; yea, when it is esteemed even an *honour* boldly to profess the religion of Jesus ; then that faith which is *false* or *imaginary*, is not always detected. For woeful experience hath shewn, that many *live*, yea, *die* under a firm persuasion that all is well, and are never awakened from their slumbers, until they are plunged headlong into the gulf of everlasting despair.

Now that this false or imaginary faith, which in many respects has a striking analogy to that which is true and saving, not only differs from it in NAME,

but in FACT, our blessed Lord teaches us in the 13th chapter of Matthew already referred to. For,

1. He assigns a particular reason why a temporary or false faith continued not *to grow*; viz. because it was sown on ground which was stony. At first, says Christ, it *grew well*; but it was unable to sustain the heat of the sun, and therefore *withered*. On the contrary, true faith, which is compared to seed that is sown on good ground, takes root deeply, and will remain, though the piercing rays of a meridian sun beat upon it.

And thus Christ directs us to the source whence the difference springs. The *heart* of the one is *stony*; unfeeling, unmoved; no human energy can soften it. Hence the seed that is cast into it falls indeed upon the understanding and *judgment*, but it takes no root in the *heart*. The heart of the other is compared to ground which is *soft*, mellow, good, which by convictions, by discoveries which it hath made of its true situation, and by a true godly sorrow, hath become tender, and is thus in a situation not only to receive the seed on its surface, but also in such a manner that it may shoot forth its roots.

Were we here to present you with two examples of persons, the one of whom had a heart remarkable for its tenderness, the other a heart truly hardened, we would refer you to the pious king *Josiah*, and the wicked king *Zedekiah*. When the former heard the book of the law read, his *heart* became *tender*, and he *humbled himself before the Lord*. That seed shot forth its root, 2 Kings xxii. 19. But when the latter heard Baruch read the same book of the law, the seed fell on stony ground: for instead of becoming *tender*, his heart was hardened against it, insomuch that he took the book in which the law was written, cut

it into pieces, and burned it in the fire. Jeremiah xxxvi. 21, 24.

2. That there is an essential difference between imaginary and saving faith, appears also from what Paul teaches us, 1 Cor. ii. 3, where he observes, that all faith, to whatever height it may attain, even though *it go so far as to induce us to give all our goods to the poor, and our bodies to be burnt, that yet it would profit us nothing, if that faith did not work by love*, and brought forth unto God the real fruits of sanctification. Hence it is clear, that Paul distinguishes between one species of faith which is *dead*, and unaccompanied with the exercise of *love*; and another species which is *lively* and active in bringing forth fruit.

A more particular view of this will be now presented, in proceeding agreeably to the *third* thing proposed, to *shew*, “in what particularly consists the “*difference between imaginary and saving faith.*” To do this with as much perspicuity as possible, we shall

1. Make it appear, that *saving* and imaginary faith in many respects strikingly resemble each other; yea, that the latter in some points of view excels the former: and then

2. Point out its defects, and wherein lies the vast difference between it and saving faith.

1. A false or imaginary faith has in many respects an agreement with that which is *saving*. For *both* have one and the same *foundation* on which their superstructure is erected: both the one and the other are obtained in a *certain manner*: both have *various acts* by which it is exercised: both produce fruits by which it manifests itself; and both at times are accompanied with joy and gladness.

Let us examine each in particular.

1. They have both *one ground* and *one foundation* on which they rest, viz. *God* and *Christ*, who by the word of the gospel being faithfully administered, are made known. All the truths which God hath revealed in his word, both the true and false believer embrace as the object of his faith.

“Yes,” says a temporary believer, “the word is *not only* my foundation on which I build, but also “under the preaching of the word, I have experienced the Holy Spirit *operating* on my soul.” For his heart has been impressed with the force of truth, and thereby felt some distress and painful anxiety of mind, which if he had not too soon shaken off, might possibly have brought him into that way the end of which is peace.

A true believer has also the word of God for the object of his faith, and by its ministrations has in like manner received the Spirit, who hath opened his understanding. Infomuch that he views divine truths with a different eye from whatever he had done before.

2. They agree as to the manner in which the subject becomes a partaker of either the one or the other.

Ask the man who appears to have true faith, but who has it not in reality,—“In what manner hast thou attained to it?” the answer in many instances would be, “It was not only by *instruction* derived “from the *hearing* and reading of the word of God, “but I have often experienced strong convictions: “I have seen that there existed an absolute necessity of my being converted: my conscience hath “many times admonished and alarmed me; and the “result hath been a *thorough* change. For formerly “I was *ungodly*, but now am become a good member

“ of society ; and not only so, but I serve God, and
 “ shew a due respect to all the duties of religion.
 “ Those who are pious are my companions. The
 “ company of the men of the world I have forsaken,
 “ so that I have escaped the pollutions of the world.”

Ask now the true believer in what way he was made a partaker of faith ; it is frequently the case that he will be afraid of saying much on this subject, but still true faith is always preceded by *convictions*, and it is no uncommon thing that before the believer durst conclude that he possesses faith, he is made to experience much distress, much anguish and much terror.

3. They correspond with each other in respect to their several *acts* ; for instance,

1. To faith appertains *knowledge*. The temporary believer will be ready to say, “ I have been taught
 “ the truths which are necessary to be known in order
 “ to salvation ; I know that I am a *miserable sinner* ;
 “ I know that there is a Jesus, and that I must have
 “ an interest in him, if I shall be for ever happy ; I
 “ know, in a word, that there is no other way of
 “ coming to him but by faith, and that faith must
 “ manifest itself to be genuine, by the fruits which it
 “ produces.” Of all these truths there are times when he has a very *clear*, exact and distinct apprehension. Where faith is exercised is there an *assent* of the mind to divine truths ? The temporary believer says, with my whole heart I assent to them ; be it far from me to entertain the smallest doubt with respect to them ; nay, I am ready to enter the lists with all who presume to express their opposition to them, and to evidence that I do in reality believe the doctrines of the bible, I order my walk and conversation after the manner of those who have been changed and renewed, agreeably to and by the truths of the gospel,

Is the essential act of faith a taking of refuge unto, and a reception of Jesus? Here again the temporary believer, by the light of truth which is enkindled in his soul, may go very far; he believes that he is a sinner, and that he can be justified before God alone, by Christ. To what does this lead him? Is he convinced of sin? Has he obtained a view of the holiness and justice of God? He runs and flies to Christ; he receives him for justification, that he may be able to stand before God in judgment, and thus quiets his awakened conscience, but afterwards gives himself no concern to be conformable to the image of Christ in sanctification.

And in respect to the *fiducial* act of faith; the man who is in the exercise of a false faith goes far before the afflicted but sincere Christian, for he applies Christ and all the promises to himself with the greatest confidence, whilst the latter does it with much fear and trembling, and even then dares not to draw a favourable conclusion, and is fearful lest he be not one of those to whom the promises are made.

4. They agree with each other in their fruits as respects sanctification. The temporary believer may have a sight of sin; he may hate and abhor it; he may avoid and oppose it, but then it is only with respect to those sins which are naked to the eye of the world, and which, by indulging himself in, would injure or destroy his reputation, and remove the mask of religion which he had assumed, or *those sins* which would have a tendency to disturb the repose of his soul, for he is one whose self-love operates so powerfully that he would go the greatest length to maintain the good opinion of men, and to live in the enjoyment of peace and tranquillity. Hence he uses his utmost endeavours to prevent his sins from breaking

out into open acts ; this is all the struggle he makes. Again, the temporary believer may, in like manner, progress far in a virtuous course and appear uncommonly zealous in the performance of religious duties. Now he seeks the company of those who are distinguished for their piety, and being possessed of natural talents, he speaks with confidence and in a satisfactory manner, not only on speculative points, but on the very essentials of religion. Now he appears before the throne, he even excels in prayer, and his expressions be so correct, and at the same time so solemn and affecting, that hearts the most obdurate cannot but feel emotions of tenderness and awe. Now with a liberal hand he administers to the wants of the poor ; in a word, he may maintain strictness of discipline in his family ; in his conversation and walk he may be moral, peaceable, and be rendered eminent for sobriety ; in his dress he may be moderate, and even appear in a garb, in neatness and elegance not corresponding with that situation in him, in which he is placed in providence, so that in all that respects externals, one would say of him, *he lacketh nothing*.

Examples of this kind are not unfrequent in the word of God. *The foolish virgins as well as the wise had their lamps, arose at the cry, Behold the bridegroom cometh, and said Lord, Lord, open unto us,* Matt. xxv. There will be those at the last day, who, anxious to obtain the approving sentence of their Judge, will not hesitate to exclaim, Lord ! Lord ! *have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name cast out devils, and done many wonderful works ?* notwithstanding must hear the vindictive sentence of an insulted Deity, *Depart from me,* Matt. vii. 23.

Paul speaks of those who had been once enlightened, who had tasted of the heavenly gift, of the good

word of God, and of the powers of the world to come, who notwithstanding fell away.

The description which we meet with, Isaiah lviii. 2. is express to the point: *They sought God daily and delighted to know his ways; they did righteousness, forsook not the ordinance of their God, and took delight in approaching unto God.*

5. The temporary believer may, equally with the possessor of that faith which is true and saving, experience *much joy*; for he views himself as interested in the promises, and fondly imagines that he hath applied Christ and all his benefits to his soul; now his consolations abound; he goes on his way rejoicing that there is such a Saviour provided, and that he has only to believe in him in order to be saved. This joy, however, makes him to be elated with pride; it promotes not a principle of love to God in his heart, but rather has the fatal tendency of endearing him the more to himself.

To this extent a false or ideal faith may go; it could scarcely be credited, if the word of God had not declared it in most pointed terms, and if the examples it presents to us did not serve as a confirmation of every sentiment we have advanced on this head.

But we must now endeavour to shew that this faith, however fair an appearance it may exhibit, and in externals seem to transcend true faith, yet falls far short of it in all those points which have been mentioned, and is as widely different from it as light is from darkness, and as remote from each other as the mansions of bliss are from the gloomy regions of the damned.

a. Saving and temporary faith differ in respect to the foundation on which the subjects of each build.

The temporary believer may indeed have had convictions, but they were only common, and not produced by the special influences of the Spirit, for they have left him as they found him; he has never *renounced his own righteousness*, much less *entered into covenant with God in Christ*. And hence it is that he is seldom heard to speak with perspicuity and precision with respect to the saving operations of the Holy Spirit, manifested in the conversion of sinners, and in *bringing them out of darkness into light, and from the power of Satan unto God*; for of a real change of heart he is perfectly ignorant. Is he asked—"When wert thou converted to God?" "How didst thou, who, like others, wert born in sin, and a stranger to God, come by such a change?" He will take advantage of the different ways, according to which the word declares, God is pleased to convert men. "With such a real change," says he, "I am altogether unacquainted"—Or, "I have had from my earliest youth a desire so to live," or, "I have been in a greater or less degree, convinced of the reasonableness of such a course; I have heard and read much of divine truths—I have prized them, I have admired their harmony, my soul hath delighted in them, and also I have endeavoured to regulate my life according to them; now certainly nothing more can be required."

Does the temporary believer reason on this wise? The real child of God is exercised quite in a different manner. Although it be true, that God may have called him from his youth, or gradually brought him to the enjoyment of his fellowship, yet he will exhibit evidences of grace—he does not rest satisfied with any former experiences; but will often examine the state of his soul by the marks which are laid down

in the word of God ; and although he may not have it in his power to designate the time or place of his conversion ; still he cannot but say—“ If I look back on my former life, I find that I am now a different man from what I then was ; then I went on carelessly in a course of sinning ; I followed on whithersoever my lusts carried me, but God now hath opened to my view my true character ; I see more and more that my heart is deceitful and desperately wicked, and on this account I condemn my state. Once I found myself inclined to leave God and his service, but now I experience a cordial and sincere desire to have God for my God, and Jesus for my Saviour. Once I was devoted to the service of the world, and a slave to my lusts ; but now I esteem it my greatest privilege to serve my God, and him alone ; and *therefore* I cannot but conclude, that the Eternal hath in mercy laid his hand upon me, and effected that change, without which no man can see the kingdom of God. Yes : I will not only render to my God that service which he requires in his word, because I am bound so to do, and because otherwise I cannot expect to enjoy salvation, with eternal glory—but because I discover such a degree of amiableness both in him, and in the person and mediatorial character of the Lord Jesus. On *this* account it is, that I would consider it my greatest happiness to be enabled to live for the Lord, even though eternal felicity, or everlasting misery had no concern in the matter.

b. Is there such an essential difference between the foundations of which the temporary and true believer build ? There exists one equally great with

respect to the *manner* in which a person becomes partaker thereof.

Of this the temporary believer can only say, that he attained to by degrees. “ I discovered,” says he, “ that it was both reasonable and necessary for me to submit to the gospel ; and in order to procure rest in my conscience, I persuaded myself I really was in a gracious state. But of the pangs of the new birth, and of godly sorrow,—these are things with which I am perfectly unacquainted.”

On the contrary, if we ask the children of God, in what way they were converted, and how they became partakers of faith,—

ONE will reply, *in a mild evangelical manner*, “ God drew me with the bands of a man, and with the cords of love. From the moment I obtained a knowledge of myself, Jesus and his free and sovereign grace were manifested to me, and instantly I surrendered myself to God my Saviour, and with a heart transported with the delightful view, I sang,

“ Hail, sovereign love, that first began

“ The scheme to rescue fallen man ;

“ Hail, matchless, free, eternal grace !

“ That gave my soul an hiding-place.”

ANOTHER will answer, “ In a way so replete with delight, I was not brought over. I have not words to express the pangs my soul experienced, when it passed from death unto life. Language would fail me, were I to attempt a description of the horror and anguish I felt, of the wretchedness I endured, of the humbling views I had of myself, of the confessions I made, and of the tears which were pressed from mine eyes, when I obtained a

“ fight and a feeling sense of sin. How often have
 “ I been forced to smite upon my thigh, how often
 “ hath shame covered my face, when appearing be-
 “ fore God, by reason of mine iniquities. Yea, be-
 “ fore I could come so far as to dare to apply Jesus
 “ to myself in any respect, how shall I express the
 “ earnest enquiries I made after him. I hungered
 “ and thirsted for his righteousness: he became the
 “ supreme object of my esteem and love, especially
 “ at that time when first I got a sight of him, and
 “ heard a delightful voice utter these heart-cheering
 “ words, *Look* unto me. Viewing him as the chief
 “ of ten thousands, I fled to his embrace. I cast
 “ myself into his arms. I received him as my Jesus,
 “ as the only name given under heaven, whereby I
 “ can be saved.”

To all these exercises the temporary believer is an entire stranger. He never knew what it was in reality to be ashamed, humbled, and sorrowful on account of sin; much less what is meant by *looking unto Jesus*.

c. As a temporary faith is so essentially different from that which is true and saving, with respect to the MANNER in which a person becomes a partaker of it: not less is the difference also with regard to the ACTS in which the one and the other consist, and by which they are exercised.

The first act of faith is KNOWLEDGE. It may frequently happen that the FALSE BELIEVER has a considerable degree of information on divine subjects; but it is neither saving nor experimental. His understanding may be somewhat enlightened, but he never searches the heart to make the important enquiry, “ Is it an experimental knowledge?” He knows that God is *holy*, and that *justice* is an essential

attribute of his nature; that *sin* must be avoided; that *hell* is the receptacle which the Eternal has ordained for the finally impenitent; and that *heaven* is the glorious place which Jesus has prepared for his redeemed: But he is not in the least affected with the discovery; and thus resembles the man who can stand gazing on pictures which represent objects the most terrific, without betraying the least fear or emotion. But when God *by the light of his Spirit*, makes those same truths known, then is the soul brought as it were to *Mount Sinai*, where it beholds God seated as a *judge*; and is compelled to cry out, “*I have heard of thee with the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee, and therefore I humble myself in dust and ashes,*” Job xlii. 5, 6. From what principle proceeds this fear? Is it not the knowledge which it hath obtained of the *greatness and majesty* of God? Because the soul views God as a being who deserves all its *love*, and *all possible reverence and adoration*. Its language is, “*Who would not fear thee, O King of nations? for unto thee doth it appertain.*”

With respect to SELF-KNOWLEDGE in particular, the language of the *true* believer is, “*I am aware of being both miserable, wretched, poor, blind, and naked; not only because God declares it, but because I experience it to be true. It hath pleased God to enable me to see myself as I really am. I am not only sensible that my actions are sinful, but also that my heart is the corrupt fountain from whence issues those streams which pollute and render my best performances to be loathed by that God, whose nature is perfect holiness.*”

The temporary believer, on the other hand, believes indeed that he is a sinner; but at the same time can plead in favour of his iniquities. He urges that

he is not the worst of transgressors; he conceives that there are others more abandoned than he is; and thinks that in sinning his intentions were none of the worst; that there is no one living but commits sin, and many who are infinitely greater sinners than he hath ever been. Such were the sentiments of the *Pharisee*, Luke xviii. 11, *who stood and prayed thus with himself: God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers.* While the true believer, in the sincerity of his heart, with the humble publican, who *dared not to lift up his eyes unto heaven, stood afar off, and smote on his breast,* will exclaim, verse 13, *Lord be merciful to me a sinner.*

Do we consider *knowledge* as it respects the LORD JESUS? In this also the temporary believer comes very far too short. He knows him indeed in his names, offices, natures, and states. He might be able to describe him in all his characters, and represent him to others as truly amiable. Yea; he can be filled with *astonishment* and *admiration* at the existence of such a Mediator. But because he hath never attained to a right knowledge of himself, his heart hath never earnestly sought him. He does not see for himself any form or comeliness in Jesus, why he should desire—He does not, in fact, believe, that it is absolutely necessary that he be interested in him. How greatly does the temporary believer resemble the person *in health*, who is told that there is a physician who can make the deaf to hear, the blind to see, and whose skill is so universal, that it extends to all manner of diseases. He will indeed be astonished that such qualifications meet in one man. He will greatly admire his skilfulness in practice: but *that is all.* But let this information be given to one

who labours under some malady. His soul will be filled with joy, and an ardent desire to see one so celebrated in his profession will be formed within him. "O!" says he, "convey me straightway to him, that I may receive assistance from him." He cannot be at rest in his mind, until he have an interview with him, and apply to him for relief. Such is the knowledge of every true believer, that whilst it illuminates the *head*, it also affects the *heart*. His language again is, "I have indeed before now been in some respects satisfied with Christ: but it is only since God has been pleased to discover to me my awful situation, and my need of him for salvation, that I want words to express how precious he is to my soul in every point of view; in his NAMES, in his OFFICES, and in his WHOLE PERSON, he is to me *the chief of ten thousands*. Is he a *king*? he is precious; for in this exalted character he will erect his throne in my heart, subdue all my lusts, and reign over me as a gracious sovereign. Is he a *priest*? he is precious; for as such he will reconcile me to God. Is he a *prophet*? he is precious; for as the teacher who hath come from God, *he will make me wise unto salvation*. Yes; he is precious to me, both in his *state of humiliation and of exaltation*, and in his *two natures*, the *divine* and *human*. In a word, he is altogether *lovely*. It is a view of Jesus in these different lights, that at first attracted me to him, makes me to love him still, and produces constant and strong desires to hold delightful intercourse with him."

Again, a temporary believer has some knowledge of the NATURE OF TRUE FAITH. He knows that it consists in the act of *habitually* FLYING TO and RECEIVING OF CHRIST. But this knowledge has

never influenced his heart. It has never led him to *renounce* sin, to make Jesus his refuge, or to accept of him as he is offered in the gospel. He hath acquired it merely by reading the word, or by hearing *faith* so frequently described by the *heralds* of Christ. BUT the *true believer*, although he may be unable to give an accurate definition of the peculiar nature of faith, yet, taught by the Lord, he knows experimentally wherein it consists. "O!" says he, "I well know what it is to *hunger* and *thirst*, for many times have I felt the flame of ardent desire kindled in my heart! I well know what it is to abandon my righteousness and all false refuges, and to fly to Christ for safety. For times without number have I done it."

Once more, the temporary believer has conception of the NATURE of SANCTIFICATION, and finds from the word of God, that it consists in the *mortification* of the *old*, and in the *vivification* of the new man; that it is *begun* in conversion, and that whilst life continues, the subject of it must more and more progress in holiness. But his desires to become holy in heart and life are small. He is willing perhaps to do just so much as he conceives to be necessary to put him in possession of heaven, and of the beatitude of the redeemed.

Does he strive against sin? It is but EXTERNALLY; but he never descends to the bottom of his heart, that he may come at the root of evil. Does he perform duties? It is only as we remarked, in an external manner. But of the *exercise* of COMMUNION WITH GOD, and of applying to Christ; to be made to bring forth fruit, of living a life of watchfulness, he has not the smallest knowledge.

On the contrary, the true believer knows that he

must be holy, because *God who hath called him is holy*. He is sensible, that in order completely to mortify sin, he must begin with the heart; and that it is a work extremely arduous. Nothing produces in him more sorrow and distress, than the reflection that sins and corruptions so much abound: he knows, in a word, that if duties be performed acceptably to God, the heart must be purified, and therefore he knows experimentally what it is to hold sweet converse with his God, and to call in the strength of Jesus to his aid, in the discharge of every duty.

Lastly, The knowledge which the temporary believer HAS OF HEAVEN, is vastly different from that which the true Christian experiences. The *former* views heaven as *a place of delight and pleasure*, where there will be for ever a perfect freedom from punishment. It is on *this account* he wishes to be admitted into it, and not because he will there be perfectly *holy*, and *know* and *enjoy* his God, as his everlasting portion. But the *latter* contemplating the mansions which Jesus has prepared for the children of his love, to be places where perfect holiness reigns,—it is this which induces him to long to be there, to the end that he may serve his God, and be fully delivered from all that imperfection and impurity which cleaves to him in the present state.

The SECOND *act* of faith is ASSENT. In respect to this also the temporary believer widely differs from him whose faith is true and saving. The FORMER assents to the TRUTHS which God hath revealed, because *they are worthy of all acceptance*, and *harmonize* in a most pleasing manner. He even assents to those which are most *experimental*, because he is convinced that they are *absolutely* necessary. However, it is a *mere assent*; he is a total stranger to any

feeling sense of them upon his heart. But THE LATTER gives a TWOFOLD ASSENT. He assents to the doctrines of the bible, because the *Eternal* has uttered and promulgated them; and thus *sets to his seal that God is true*, John iii. 33; and also because his soul in its own experience, hath realized them. The *physician*, from his *acquaintance* with the *structure* of the human body, may give to his patient an accurate description of the disease under which he labours; but the *patient* judges to his accuracy in the case alone from *his own experience* corresponding with the *description* given. So the true believer; his language is, “To all what God hath revealed of himself, of the Lord Jesus, and of the deplorable situation of sinners, I say *Amen*: For—no sinner is so wretched as I am—Of such a mediator I stand in need.” Thus *the Spirit witnesseth in the heart*, that *the Spirit speaking in the word is truth*.

Thirdly—Temporary and saving faith differ with respect to the *act*, by which the soul *betakes itself to Christ as its refuge*. The temporary believer *professes* to renounce *sin, Satan, and the world*; but he does no more than *profess*. His heart not having been cleansed from the *love* of sin, he retains a fondness for it still, and continues to embrace it *in secret* as that in which his soul delighteth: whilst *in public* he appears in the character of *one* who has yielded himself up to Christ. If he has received *Christ*, it was not as an *whole* Saviour; for he applied to him only to take his guilt, and to secure him from punishment. He will not submit that as king, *Jesus* should ever *reign* in his heart.

But the TRUE believer embraces Christ in the most cordial manner. He receives him in all his offices both for *time* and eternity. He is made wil-

ling to renounce every thing but Christ. He will not take sin by the hand, nor any longer practise it as before. So far from it—he is repeatedly calling in terms the most persuasive, upon Christ to reign in and over him. And because he is oftentimes in doubt, and afraid, lest he may not have been sincere, in the act of surrendering himself to Jesus, he renews and repeats it on every opportunity.

d. If temporary and saving faith so essentially differ from each other, with respect to the *foundation*, the *manner* of obtaining it, and the *acts* by which both are exercised ; not less is the difference with regard to the *fruits* which each respectively produce.

The *temporary* believer not only may bring forth *fruit*, but *much* fruit ; by which he not only deceives *himself* but *others* also. That he may be esteemed and respected as a man of piety, he will put on the *mask* of Christianity at the very same time that he *denies*, and is perfectly ignorant of the power of it. This external appearance is extremely fair and pleasing ; but he is rottenness within. His *words* and his *manner* bespeak the *man* of *humility* ; but his heart is swollen with pride and vanity. He lends the listening ear, to hear what others say of him ; and if he be praised by any, his soul is *charmed* therewith. He does not *hate sin* considered as *sin* ; for if his actions at any time be opposite to those which are good and pious ; if he commit *sin*—he will be quite unconcerned ; provided it can be hidden from the eyes of the world. —If, on the other hand, his actions in particular instances be *religious*, and such as become the real Christian—he is anxious that they be *universally* known ; and like the Pharisees, when they gave alms, —he will seek to place them in the fairest point of light.

The *true* believer on the contrary *brings* forth

fruit which proceeds from a heart purified by *divine* grace, from *sinful* self-love—His object in all he does, is not so much to *please men*—as to please his God and Saviour—He *hates* sin, because God detests it.—Do any of his actions savour of unrighteousness, his soul is *disquieted within* him—His heart in consequence of it is filled with sorrow, and shame covers his countenance—Does he at any time violate the law, which demands of us to *love our neighbour*—Does he perform any action which is injurious to a *fellow-creature*, he will not find freedom to approach unto God, until *he* hath repaired the injury.

In respect to the DUTIES of religion—It is not uncommon to hear him complain of his many deficiencies—Does he advance in holiness—he is not anxious concerning its being *known* abroad,—It is enough in his opinion—that God with his omniscient eye beholds both the *secrets* of his heart—and all his conduct. At the same time also that he knows—that *the Lord* looketh not on the outward appearance, but on the heart. He is desirous, that *his light should shine forth before men*, that others seeing his good works, might GLORIFY his father in heaven—His actions are small in his view, when compared with those which others have performed ; does he at any time do an act of kindness, a charity ; he does not let his left hand know what his right doeth, and would always wish to do good works from a good principle, and with a good end in view.

e. Lastly—Temporary and saving faith are essentially different from one another—in respect to the JOY which is felt by him, who possesses only a temporary faith, and by him who is a partaker of that which is true and saving.—The temporary believer, says Christ, RECEIVETH the word with joy. He may be so taken up with divine truths, and be employ-

ed in the investigation of them to such an extreme, that he appropriates to them that time which ought to be devoted to other purposes. Yes : He goes so far as to apply divine truths to himself—he makes himself happy in this, that he is interested in the promises—He *works* himself up to a belief that *Jesus* died *for him*—and by all this his soul is made to *rejoice* and to be *exceeding glad*.

But the true believer, although he may enjoy so much satisfaction in the contemplation of divine truths, that he can say, *By these things I live, and in all these is the life of my soul* ; yet he dares not apply them with joy to his soul, until God himself causes him to see his interest in them. He is often distressed lest all his knowledge of the doctrines of the gospel be only *speculative* ; or should it please the Lord to permit him to see his interest in Christ, and his right to the divine promises, *clear and certain*, the delightful view will cause him to be so *humble* before the Lord, and so *little* in his own eyes, that with Mary he will with joy express himself in the following humble strains. Luke i. 38, 48.

Behold the handmaid of the Lord ! Be it unto me according to thy word, for he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaid. Yes : the joy which the true believer feels, is accompanied with *love* to God and Christ, insomuch that he will often with David exclaim—Psalm 18, 1. *I love thee, O Lord, my strength.* And the LOVE of the *triune* God towards the Christian *constrains* him to make returns, and to evidence its sincerity by an *holy* walk. 1. Cor. v. 14, 15.

For the love of Christ constraineth us ; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead, and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him that died for them and rose again.

See thus. How *vast*—how *essential* the difference between a *false* and ideal faith, and that which is *true* and *saving*. But to ascertain this with still greater precision, we must add in addition to what has been said—the following *marks*, to the end that the possessor of the *former* may see his *awful state depicted*; and the real follower of Christ may be *encouraged* to go on his way rejoicing.

1. The temporary believer is averse from *self-examination*. If he be urged to take a view of his heart, and to try it by the undeceiving *marks* which are found in the written word, that only TRUE touchstone; he is afraid to enter upon the solemn business. And why is he afraid? Only because he is well assured that he would not be able to stand the *test*, and that the result of the trial would be, that at best he would discover himself to be *covered* with *wounds*, and polluted by putrifying *sores*. He never opens his case to any *faithful* minister of Christ, and is sure to conceal it from his *pious* friends. He never goes to God with a heart exercised as David's was when he cried: Psalm cxxxix. *Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting*. He fondly, in a word, hopes that his state is GOOD, and he seems determined that it should always appear such in his view.

But on the other hand, the *true believer*, although when he considers himself as having backslidden, may feel a degree of hesitation to enter upon the examination of his heart, and thus may resemble the merchant, who because his books of account are entangled, and in a perplexed situation, is afraid to commence the necessary work of seeing how his affairs stand; yet is habitually disposed to examine

into the real state of his *heart*, for he is always *suspicious* of himself, and fearful of being deceived. Hence oftentimes he unbosoms himself to his experienced Christian friends.—Yes: he goes to God, and not unfrequently pleads that HE would try *what manner* of spirit he was of.

2. The temporary believer can meet with nothing to which he is more *averse*, than *to be* brought to a discovery of *his real situation before God*; and therefore when under sermon, or in company with persons who are truly pious, he hears described the slender foundations on which hypocrites build, and has delineated, their true character; he says to himself, because conscience, the faithful monitor which is within, suggests it—“*All that has been spoken was intended for me—it was suitable to my case.*” Hence anger is retained in his heart, and secret malice in his bosom. But on the contrary—the true believer seeks after such ministers *as desire to be found faithful*, chooses for his companions those *honest* Christians who will deal *plainly* with him; and with his heart elevated to the throne, addresses his Saviour and his God—*Let the righteous smite me, it shall be a kindness, and let him reprove me, it shall be an excellent oil.* Psalm cxli. 4.

3. The temporary believer cannot endure to be reprehended with respect to *his walk and conversation*, even though the reproof be in *love*, and delivered in terms the most tender and moderate. He will form excuses for any deficiencies which may have been suggested to him, and is careful to avoid those who, acting like men, dare to be faithful to *his soul* and to *their God*.

The true believer delights in nothing so much as to have presented full in his view, those failings of

which he hath not been conscious ; his heart may indeed rise up against any reprehension which may have been given in an *imperious* and upbraiding manner ; or when others are present. But if the reproof be in *secret*, if it savour of *love* and *discretion* ; if it proceed from a desire of benefiting him ; it will be received with gratitude, and he will rejoice in that in faithfulness he hath been warned of a conduct which was not conducive to the glory of God—but the reverse.

4. The temporary believer views his GOOD ACTIONS through a *glass* which is greatly magnified, and *his sins* through the smallest medium. He sets the highest value on deeds which have the remotest appearance of goodness attached to them, but his sins, though they be in number *as the sand on the sea-shore*, and have been aggravated *so that they have reached the very clouds*, still he conceives them to be *small* in comparison with those which others have committed.

But the true believer entertains the meanest opinion with respect to his best performances ; he makes no mention of them when engaged in petitioning him who is the hearer of prayer, much less does he consider them as a foundation on which he may build ; his sins, though not seen by another, are *great*, yea most heinous in his eyes ; often he is heard to say, “ than
“ I am there is not to be found a greater sinner.”

5. The temporary believer will not *readily suffer himself to be convinced*, that the foundation on which he has erected his *hope* of heaven, is one which will not stand ; though it even be shewn him that many of his actions are such as must make him to appear before God, yea, in the eyes of the world, as a person who is still in a *graceless* state, yet, provided he can point to but *one act* of his life which has some appear-

ance of being of a pious nature, he will lay hold of it, and continue to think himself *secure* of *Heaven*.

But the true believer is easily alarmed ; though on the review of his life he discovers that he has done much good, yet if he recollects but one sin, which had and still continues to have the mastery over him, he will be instantly led to enquire, “ Is this consistent with grace.” Distress ensues.

6. The temporary believer always continues in the *self-same* situation ; he knows not what it is to *sit in darkness*, and is a stranger to the enjoyment of *true Spiritual light* ; whether he commit sin, or whether he perform duties, he is alike satisfied that *all is well*, and that *all will end well*.

On the contrary, the experiences and the frames of the true believer are *many* and *very unlike* ; he has been taught what it is to *see no light*, and *walk in the light of the Lord*. Does God conceal his face from him ? Does he experience deadness in his soul ? Does his heart cleave to the dust ? The frame of the believer under such circumstances, is distressing ; *no sorrow is then like unto his sorrow*. But again ; does he enjoy the light of *Jehovah's countenance* ? Is his soul awakened, quickened ? Then *joy* and *delight* reign within.

Thus, with as much clearness and precision as possible have we attempted to discuss a subject, than which no one can be more interesting, no one more important.

Let us now in the FOURTH place proceed, as was proposed, to give some advice and direction to those unhappy and miserable men, who are likely to be deluded into hell by an ideal faith ; or who, by means of this discourse, may have been made to experience distress, and to enquire, *men and brethren, what shall we do to be saved ?*

Our *advice* to you is,

1. From what has been said, LEARN to what lengths a person may go in making a *shew* of his having grace, and yet not have it in *reality*; it may be a mean to lead you to discover what your present situation is.

2. *Consider* how awful the *condition* of hypocritical professors will be, in the sight of an holy God, who delighteth not in the service of the *lips*, but demands the hearts of men; *none* are so abominable as they; the Lord Jesus considered them obnoxious to the *woes* which he denounced on the Pharisees. Will not the hottest place in hell be assigned to them *who name the name of Christ*, but who have never felt the power of divine grace upon their hearts, and *depart not* from iniquity? For when the greatest sinners are threatened with everlasting destruction, is it not declared, *that their portion shall be in the lake of fire, with hypocrites*. You may deceive yourselves; you may blind the eyes of men; but God cannot be deceived, for *he is the searcher of the heart*, and trieth the reins.

3. Never *shun* or *neglect* those means which may be blessed to your conviction, but *improve* them; attend on the ministrations of those faithful servants of Christ, who *seek not to daub with untempered mortar*; let not your hearts rise up against their pious admonitions, but rather view them as designed to point out to you the only way by which a sinner can find favour with God. Yes, sinners, when ye attend on those means which God hath appointed, let such ejaculations as these proceed from each of you:
 “ Lord! grant that this may be the happy period
 “ when my heart shall be deeply impressed with di-
 “ vine things, when thou wilt *shew me what evil ways*
 “ *are in me*; when thou wilt lead me in the way ever-
 “ *lasting.*”

4. Are any of you awakened, and convinced of the necessity of experiencing the power of religion on your souls? and are made sensible of your having never as yet felt that power? Seek to keep alive religious impressions of this kind, and go with them unto your God; confess before him the folly of your past conduct, and say, "Lord! I have lived sufficiently
 " long without having any experimental acquaintance
 " with thee; already too long have I been dealing de-
 " ceitfully with myself, and acted an unfaithful part
 " towards thee; I am ashamed of a conduct so un-
 " wise; bring thou me into the right way before it be
 " for ever too late; cause thou me not only to *appear*
 " to fly to Christ, but *in reality* to embrace him as
 " my Saviour and Redeemer, God." Who can tell but by dealing in such a faithful manner with yourselves, God will look upon you in mercy! He is a *compassionate* and gracious God.

THE LAST THING PROPOSED was, to *endeavour* to ANIMATE and ENCOURAGE the AFFLICTED and DEJECTED CHILD of God, especially with respect to their approach to the table of the Lord.

Here, perhaps, the soul that is overwhelmed with distress, having heard with attention what we have advanced on the subject which we have attempted in the fear of the Lord to discuss, will be ready to say, "Is
 " such a subject calculated in any manner to raise the
 " *sinking* and *depressed* spirit of a child of God; it
 " cannot be otherwise but a topic of this kind must
 " produce more distress, and a greater degree of dis-
 " quietude; for my daily *concern* and *fear* is, that I am
 " no more than a possessor of a *temporary faith*."

We make thee this reply: "If thou hast strictly at-
 " tended to every thing which we have advanced,
 " then thou wilt be compelled to acknowledge that

“ the difference between *true faith* and that which is
 “ *temporary* and false, is so astonishingly *great* that thou
 “ must be sensible that thou hast sufficient grounds to
 “ satisfy thee that thy faith is not ideal, false or tem-
 “ porary, but true, justifying and saving;” for,

1. Wouldst thou readily be numbered amongst those who have only an *appearance* of being in the faith? Can an external profession produce content in thy mind? Canst thou be at ease when thy heart is not right before God? Is it thy highest satisfaction to please men? or with the sweet finger of Israel, dost thou elevate thine heart and voice in the following strains, expressive of thy *gratitude* and *delight* in the service of God?

*What shall I render to my God
 For all his kindness shewn?
 My feet shall visit thine abode,
 My songs address thy throne.
 Now I am thine, for ever thine,
 Nor shall my purpose move:
 Thy hand has loos'd my bonds of pain,
 And bound me with thy love.
 Here in thy courts I leave my vow,
 And thy rich grace record;
 Witness ye saints who hear me now,
 If I forsake the Lord.*

2. Dost thou not at times enter upon an investigation of thine heart, and art thou not willing that thy heart should even be searched by thy God?

3. Is not Jesus *precious* to thy soul, in consequence of having been taught how greatly thou needest him? Is not the principle of *self-righteousness* rooted out of thine heart, and hast thou not given thyself over unto God and Christ? Thy faith, then, is not that which is temporary and false, but *true, saving*, and which will endure whilst thou hast need of faith,

even until IT shall be changed into sight, and THY HOPE into the FULL FRUITION of THY *Jesus* in glory.

YES, thou wilt be ready to say, “*To answer these questions, and to come to such a comfortable conclusion, are things most difficult.*”—But O! thou *whose soul art so disquieted within thee*, suffer us to ask thee:

1. Wilt thou not have *God for thy God*, and the *Lord Jesus* for thy Redeemer? Art thou *opposed* to receiving him as he offers himself to thee? Wilt thou not have him for thine ALL AND IN ALL? Wilt thou make an exception with respect to any thing whatever? Is not all that is IN HIM *altogether* lovely and precious in thy view?

2. Dost thou not wish to give him thine *whole heart*, that he may wholly *possess* it, *reign* and *rule* over it?

3. When thou reviewest thy life, and discoverest that thou hast brought forth but *little fruit*, is thy soul at ease? Or is it not filled rather with sore distress at the contemplation of thine ingratitude?—Would not thine heart rejoice, if *sin* were more and more *mortified*, and if the *image of God* beamed forth with more resplendent brightness in thy walk and in thy life?

4. Dost thou not therefore fly to *Jesus*, that thou mightest *in and by him* be made *fruitful*? Is it not the language of thy soul—Would to God that *Jesus were made unto me* SANCTIFICATION as well as wisdom and righteousness. And,

5. Is it not on this account that thou hast so frequently longed for the approach of that day when thou shalt again be invited to appear at the table of the Lord, with a view of meeting with thine *all-sufficient* and thy *precious* Redeemer, who under the *emblems of bread and wine*, is there set forth *crucified* and slain,

—and as the Lamb of God, *that taketh away the sins of the world?*—Art thou desirous of meeting with him—and of coming under *new* obligations to serve and honour him? Canst thou not express thyself in language of this kind?—“ALL that I AM and HAVE
 “I would humbly hope *I have given* unto Jesus—And
 “if I have never at any former period of my life done
 “it aright, it is the ardent wish of my soul, that I may
 “now have grace to do it. And I have this the EVI-
 “DENCE of my sincerity—that as the HART panteth
 “after the water-brooks, so MY HEART panteth after
 “GOD, after *holiness*, and after *heaven* too, because
 “of its being an holy *place*, and because all its holy
 “inhabitants are constantly engaged in ascriptions of
 “praise, equally to the IMMACULATE LAMB as to
 “GOD the FATHER and GOD the Holy Ghost.”

And indeed! Are these the experiences of thy soul? Be then no more troubled—Go forth with boldness to the Lord’s supper—Make use of this delightful sacrament for thy consolation, and for strengthening the *life* of faith, which thy Jesus, *the author and finisher of faith*, hath caused to spring up in thine heart. Cast thyself again into thy Redeemer’s arms. He will most certainly receive thee in mercy again, and manifest the *riches* of his love to thee.

The Lord who is able to make all grace to abound—cause his blessing to be on what we have said—and make it a mean in his hand to bring *conviction* to *sinners* who are unconverted to God, and to *encourage* his own CHOSEN and redeemed ones.

A M E N.

THE

PIOUS COMMUNICANT.

Lecture III.

THE ASSURANCE OF CHRISTIANS, A
FRUIT OF SAVING FAITH.

HAVING, in the preceding discourses, addressed you on the nature of faith, and shewn wherein consists the great difference between that which is true and saving, and that which is false and delusory; we now proceed to consider and investigate the sentiments, which the word records, on the interesting doctrine of the *assurance of faith*.

That we may express ourselves on a subject of such importance, with the precision and perspicuity it merits, we must,

I. Shew that assurance is not the ESSENCE of faith, but the fruit of it; and endeavour to make it appear.

II. That the Christian MAY attain to the assurance of faith; and that it is a DUTY which is peculiarly obligatory upon him to aspire after it: then,

III. We shall point out the NATURE of assurance, or wherein it actually consists. After which,

IV. We shall endeavour to AWAKEN the children of God, and to PRESS it upon them, to seek to obtain the assurance of their faith; and,

V. Shew whence it is, that there are so FEW Christians, who are animated on their way, by the assurance, that *the end of their faith will be the salvation of their souls.*

VI. We shall lay before you THE MEANS, in the use of which, Christians, with the divine blessing, may become assured of their faith.

VII. We shall attempt such an improvement of the subject, as may contribute to the *advantage* of unconverted sinners; and tend to promote the consolation of true believers of every description.

I. That ASSURANCE is not the ESSENCE, but a FRUIT of faith, is a proposition which it is necessary FIRST of all to attempt to demonstrate, not only that the sentiments of the Remonstrants and Libertines may be exhibited, who, with a view of encouraging persons in their carelessness, form to themselves no other idea of faith, than a notion that it consists in being able merely to say, "Jesus is my Saviour;" but also that souls, who have often experienced much pain and distress, by reason of having formed improper ideas on this subject, may be kept from despondency, and encouraged, whilst travelling through this wilderness to the mansions which their Jesus hath prepared for them. The ARGUMENTS by which this doctrine is supported, are the following: viz.

1. The *word of God* no where teaches that assurance precedes faith, but in many places testifies, that it is a consequence which results from it.—Ephes. iii.
12. *In whom we have boldness, and access with confidence, by the faith of him; so that faith is the mean, by which this boldness, and access with confidence, is*

obtained ; in the second epistle of Paul to Timothy, chap. i. 12. that inspired apostle says, *I know in whom I have believed* : hence it appears that he had FIRST believed, and that AFTERWARDS he was assured of it. It is said, Rom. i. 17. we must go *from faith to faith*, namely, from a WEAK to a STRONG faith. John says, in his first epistle, chap. v. 13 ver. *These things have I written unto you that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God*. Here a distinction is made between KNOWING and BELIEVING. In like manner, the author of the epistle to the Hebrews, chap. x. 22. exhorts Christians *to draw near, with a true heart in the full assurance of faith* ; a certain evidence this, that one may have faith, and yet want the assurance of it.

2. It is also clear, from the *very nature of things* ; for, to take refuge in Jesus, is the *mean*, by which the soul attains to a confidence of its interest in him : now as the means and the end are things which are perfectly distinct from each other, so the *essence* and the *assurance* of faith cannot be viewed as one and the same.

3. In no part of our Bibles is it asserted, that our salvation is immediately connected with assurance, or absolutely depends upon it ; but on the contrary,—*To hunger and to thirst after Christ's righteousness,—to fly to Christ, and to seek refuge beneath the shadow of his wings*—these are represented as essentially necessary to obtain that *inheritance which is incorruptible and undefiled, which fadeth not away, and which is reserved in heaven for the people of God*. See Psalms ii. 12. *Blessed are all they that put their trust in him*. —Also Pf. lxxix. 32. *The humble shall see this, and be glad ; and your heart shall live, that seek God*. Now

if hunger and thirst be one thing, and *to be satisfied* another; if the act of *taking refuge* supposes the absence of *rest*, and if *seeking* and *finding* be terms, which express things which are altogether different; then *to believe in Christ*, is one point, and to be assured of that faith, another.

4. The EXAMPLES of persons, who were indeed believers, and men eminent for piety; but who, at certain times of their lives at least, were destitute of the assurance of faith, demonstrate the truth of our position. Asaph said, *I suffer thy terrors, I am distracted*.—David, when engaged in prayer to his God, thus expressed himself, Ps. li. 12. *Restore unto me, the joy of thy salvation*—an evidence, that this man of God, at that particular period, had not the experience of it.

5. When the Spirit of God, in the Word, introduces the subject of faith, he frequently employs, for the purpose of setting forth wherein its essence consists, PHRASES which are peculiarly expressive indeed of the GENUINE, but at the same time, of some of the weaker acts of it. Is not *believing in Christ* expressed by our Lord himself as *seeing the Son*?—*And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son and believeth on him, may have everlasting life*, John vi. 40. Are not true believers compared to *bruised reeds* and to *smoking flax*? *A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench*.—Who are they whom Jesus gathers in his arms, and carries in his bosom? It will be replied, Doubtless none but true believers. And to what are they likened? To the weak and tender *lamb*. *He shall feed his flock like a shepherd, he shall gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom; and shall gently lead those who are with young*.

6. If assurance constituted the essential act of faith, in such case, *false and temporary believers*, on the one hand, *might be said to have faith*; for none with so much boldness, and apparent confidence as they, dare to draw the favourable conclusion, that they are in a state of grace;—and on the other hand, *the sincere Christian*, who indeed fears God, but whose faith is weak, and whose soul is constantly in a state of alarm, *would* on the same principle be considered as being *in a graceless state*; to assert which would be absurd in the extreme. If assurance were the essence of faith, would not those poor distressed souls, who feel their weakness, and are sensible of their small attainments, be deprived of every source of consolation? If assurance were the essence of faith, might not then a person be to-day in a state of grace, and to-morrow in a state quite the reverse?—to maintain which would be to support a sentiment unquestionably erroneous: For the word of God declares, that the *saints* shall persevere, and that those who are united to Christ, *shall be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation*, 1 Pet. i. 4.

Is it objected, “that Paul and other Christians have attained to a high degree of assurance, and that what is true with respect to one subject is true in regard to all the followers of Christ?”—It is granted that the apostle was a bold foldier of the divine *Captain of our salvation*, and that *he was strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might*: But does it hence necessarily follow, that there are no weak Christians, no tender lambs in the fold of Christ? If we consult the writings of the apostle John, we find him making mention, not only of *fathers*, but of *young men and little children in Christ*—see 1 John ii. 12, 13, *I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven*.

you for his name's sake. I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one. The argument that because Paul was assured of *his* faith, therefore every true Christian must in like manner be assured,—is about equivalent to an argument of this kind: “ Sampson was a *strong* “ *man*; therefore all men are endued with similar “ *strength*.”

Is it further objected, that in that excellent system of divine truths, the *Heidelberg Catechism*, faith is described as consisting, amongst other things, in *an assured confidence*?—We reply; that no argument can be deduced from this circumstance: For,

1. If we examine with a critical eye the description which is there given of faith, we immediately discover that the CONFIDENCE spoken of as constituting one of its essential acts, is of that kind, of which every believer has some experience when he betakes himself to Christ, for that safety and security which is ever to be found beneath the shadow of his wings. For, in the same sentence in which the pious authors of that invaluable catechism exhibit wherein saving faith consists, they also describe with their wonted care and precision, both what precedes faith, and what are the effects which it produces. Moreover,

2. There existed a peculiar reason at the time when that system was written, for defining faith in the manner there expressed; for the church of Rome, in addition to her other innumerable errors, denied the heart-cheering doctrine of the assurance of faith. It was in consequence of this, that those justly celebrated men, Zacharias Ursinus and Casparus Olevianus, in their catechism above alluded to, and first published in the year of our Lord 1563, under

the auspices of Frederic the third of Germany, furnished the pious, set their faces against this particular error, and taught with boldness, that the assurance of faith is possible. From all that has been said, then, it must be clear, to every one who attentively considers the subject, that assurance is not an essential act of faith: But,

II. Agreeably to the order proposed, it must now be owned, That believers MAY attain, and ought TO SEEK the assurance of faith.—

1. Believers MAY attain to an assurance: For,

A. The EXAMPLES with which scripture abounds, of saints who have been assured, establish our position in the most pointed manner. Paul *knew in whom he had believed*, 2 Tim. i. 12. David prayed, Psal. li. 12, *Restore to me the joys of thy salvation*; an evidence that, previous to his having addressed this petition to his Father, he had tasted of these joys.

B. If the assurance of faith had not been attainable, it would have been wholly in vain, and in every respect absurd, for the Holy Ghost to exhort and urge Christians to labour to arrive at such an advanced state in grace. But the apostle Paul says, 2 Cor. xiii. 5. *Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith*; and Peter urges believers to whom he wrote, 2 Pet. i. 10, *Give all diligence to make your calling and election sure*. Expressions of a very similar nature are met with in many other places.

C. Are not believers constantly in the word of God excited in the most persuasive terms to the great duty of *thankfulness*? But *for what* and *in what way* is it possible for them to express their gratitude to God, if it be out of their power ever to attain to a knowledge of their being interested in Christ, and in the blessings of the covenant of grace?

D. Hath not man a rational spirit, and can he not come to some rational conclusion as to his spiritual state by comparing the *marks* of grace which the scriptures propose, with the *experiences* of his own heart? And it is in this way a person becomes assured. God does not say in his word, “Thou “Thomas, and thou James, art a believer;”—but he there draws the outlines of a believer’s character, to the end that every person who would desire to live in the experience of true comfort may be excited with care to examine into the state of his soul.

E. If the assurance of faith be not attainable, then it necessarily follows that all the consolations, delights, and joys of the Christian will be altogether taken away. For can any one feel real comfort, or experience true pleasure and satisfaction in his soul, without a well-grounded *PERSUASION* that he is a partaker of Christ, and all his benefits?

2. Is it then a thing which is possible, that a Christian may be assured of his faith?—we further remark, that it *BEHOVES* every child of God to strive to attain to it. It is a *sin*, that believers do not with greater ardour labour after it. For,

A. It argues the *PREVALENCE* of *UNBELIEF*, that we give no credit to the testimony of God in his word, and place no dependence on his promises. Our Lord, viewing unbelief as a sin aggravated in its nature, often in the days of his flesh reproved the disciples for it, and rebuked them for being *slow of heart to believe*, Luke xxiv. 25.

B. To be continually doubting of one’s case, often proceeds from *IGNORANCE* in the believer, as appears uniformly in the case of the disciples. Is it not then sinful for the people of God not to become more acquainted with the important truths of the

gospel? Ought they not to ascertain with the greatest precision what constitutes faith, and what passes in the soul with respect to it?

C. Not to be assured of faith is attended with this evil consequence also, that the soul is thereby RETARDED in the PROGRESS it would otherwise make in the practice of MANY CHRISTIAN GRACES.

a. It operates to hinder the believer from exercising that confidential boldness with which he ought to commune with his God in secret. It keeps him from that familiar converse with Jehovah as with a father, which is always productive of supreme delight. In a word, does it not also deter him from casting all his care on Jehovah's arm, which is the great support of the Christian whilst he is passing through this valley of tears?

b. It keeps the child of God from making advances in holiness. For by means of unbelief he is afraid to apply either the promises or the Lord Jesus to his soul, seeing he is not conscious of his having any interest in them.

c. It deprives him of the comfort, joy, and delights of life; for his soul by distrusting becomes disquieted within him.

d. It keeps him, in a word, from ascribing unto God the praise and the glory due to his name for grace already received—a duty which is highly obligatory on all Christians; for how can those call upon their *souls*, and all that is within them, to bless the Lord for redeeming love, who are unable to conclude that they have ever received grace?

D. For the Christian to be in a state of uncertainty concerning his case, is very INJURIOUS. For hence it is, that his LOVE TO GOD and Christ becomes lukewarm. Hence it is that he distrusts his

God, and says, *My hope is perished, and my strength from the Lord.* Hence it is, in a word, that he is not bold to come out for Jesus, in the presence of the men of the world. A fear of being insincere, and of having nothing more than the hope of the hypocrite, has closed the mouth of many a Christian.

E. For the Christian to live without any assured confidence, has the fatal tendency of creating in the minds of men a prejudice against true religion. It impresses them with an idea that the service of God is hard, and that to walk before the face of the Lord, is to walk in the midst of gloom, and to pass a life of wretched uncertainty. And thus the sincere but unassured Christian becomes in some measure a hindrance to his neighbour, in the great things which belong to his everlasting peace. But,

III. Let us now endeavour to shew wherein the ESSENCE of the NATURE of assurance consists.

To do this, we must point out,

1. How many kinds of assurance there are.
2. Wherein it consists.
3. How and in what way Christians ought to conduct themselves in order to become assured.
4. That God's Spirit *must* and actually does in all things co-operate in bringing his people to the assurance of faith.

A. There is more than ONE kind of assurance.

a. There is an OBJECTIVE assurance, which may be defined, "A full persuasion and reliance with respect to all that God hath revealed in his word, of himself, of the Lord Jesus, and of the whole plan of salvation." This the evangelist John denominates a *receiving of the testimony of God*, whereby we *set to our seal that God is true*. This kind of as-

urance has principally respect to God as its object, and is necessarily included in assurance. But,

b. There is also an assurance which respects the SUBJECT that believes: For it is one thing to know and to believe that there is a God and a Saviour, and another to be persuaded that he is MY God, and MY Saviour. This subjective assurance is again to be considered as being of two kinds:

1. The one may be styled ORDINARY. It is produced in the soul on this wise—The believer looking into the word of God, discovers therein what is declared with respect to the heirs of salvation, to wit, that *they have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before them;—that they hunger and thirst after the righteousness of Christ;—that God gives to them a new heart, by taking away the stony heart out of their flesh, and giving them a heart of flesh;—that they love God their strength, and are inclined to follow after holiness, without which no man can see the Lord.* He then examines with the strictest scrutiny his heart upon all these points; and the result is, that he finds that all these things, in a greater or less degree, his soul has experienced—and directly draws the delightful conclusion, “*I am an heir of salvation.*”

2. The other may be called EXTRAORDINARY, and is experienced when God, approving of the faith and love of his people, manifests his satisfaction in them, by making it known to them that he views them as the children of his love, and as such delights in them.

In order rightly to comprehend the distinction which is to be made between *an ordinary* and *extraordinary* assurance, attend to the following similitude.

The child that has been for some time absent from its father, no sooner sees his face, than it

leaves its childish pursuits and companions, and runs with quickened steps to meet him. Ask this child why it observes such a conduct, it will reply,—My father whom I sincerely love is coming. But upon the child drawing near, I see the father, not passing it unnoticed by—not treating it with cold indifference as if it were a stranger,—but taking it up in his arms, and embracing it in the most cordial manner. What must be the natural conclusion which the child now draws? If it could, when first it saw its father returning, say, “*I love him,*” now it can say with equal confidence, “My father loves me.” So that to *exercise* love, and to be *embraced* in love, are two distinct things. The former a soul may do for years together, and evidence it in the practice of the duties of Christianity: But the latter is only enjoyed by the believer on particular occasions; and, in some instances, perhaps not until he comes to his death-bed, does his faithful God permit him to experience a prelibation of the happy state into which he is about to enter. But,

B. In what consists the *essence* or *nature* of assurance? It consists in this: That a person, beholding the conformity that exists between his own experiences and the principal marks of grace which are found in the word of God, is enabled thereby to draw this conclusion, “I am a child of God, and consequently an heir of eternal life.”

Hence to assurance appertain these three things: First, infallible marks of grace as exhibited in the word of God; secondly, a conformity of the heart with those marks; thirdly, a just conclusion from those premises.

If then a person on good grounds would be assured of his fellowship with God, he must first of all

carefully investigate THE MARKS which are essential to a state of grace, which must be found in believers at all times, and with respect to which the Lord himself declares, "That whosoever experiences them shall be saved."

For example :

a. God declares in his word, that all who enjoy fellowship with him, must *have received the Spirit*, and by his illuminating influence clearly discovered that by nature they are poor and miserable, and blind and naked; that they have come short of the glory of God, and that if they remain in such a situation, they must for ever perish. *Hereby we know that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit*, 1 John iv. 13.

b. God declares in his word, that in order to be saved, we must have *an interest in Christ, and in the great atonement which he hath made for sin*: For there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved, Acts iv. 12.—Therefore we must confess that we have nothing with which we can appear before God, but that all our salvation is alone found in Christ.

c. God declares in his word, *how a soul must be exercised*, that has an interest in Christ. It must have an EXPERIMENTAL KNOWLEDGE of him as a Saviour, who is all-sufficient, without whom *we can do nothing*, and who is *altogether lovely*, Songs v. 16. From this knowledge must proceed an ESTEEM, 1 Pet. ii. 7, *To you therefore that believe he is precious*. From this esteem must arise a real HUNGER and THIRST, Matt. v. 12, *Blessed are they that hunger and thirst*. There must also be a cordial reception of him, John i. 12, *As many as received him, to*

them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.

d. God declares in his word, that those who have an interest in Christ must *forfake the foolish, and go in the way of understanding*, Prov. ix. 6; i. e. they must bid an eternal farewell to their old ways of sin in which they have heretofore walked; wage an everlasting war against iniquity as an enemy most cruel and dangerous; choose the way of holiness, that narrow way of God's commands, and with a full purpose of heart determine to walk therein.

e. God declares in his word, that all those *who have passed from death unto life* must *love the brethren*, 1 John iii. 14; i. e. they must highly esteem, and hold in the bond of affection, all who fear God, of every rank and description. For all who have an interest in Christ by faith bear the image of God.

Now of all these things, as infallible marks of grace, which God himself has settled, we must have a distinct knowledge, nor are we to call any of them into question,—for the God of truth has uttered them. But,

This is not enough. In order to be assured of faith, there must be, secondly, a conformity of heart with those marks. The manner, however, in which this is effected, will presently be shown, when we point out the ways by which persons are brought to a determination respecting their state.

And having made an examination, thirdly, the conclusion itself follows. In making it, the soul reasons thus: “When I examine myself by all the
“ marks which God has laid down in his word, I
“ must acknowledge that I know something experi-
“ mentally with respect to the exercises of grace. I

“ may therefore humbly conclude, that I am a child
“ of God.”

But as it sometimes happens, that although a soul dare not deny that it has experienced these things, yet it is afraid to conclude that it is in a state of grace;—so there must be existing causes, which yet keep the soul in this uncertainty with respect to its interest in Christ. Is it asked, what those causes are? We reply,

a. It may be occasioned by the subtil devices of Satan, who constantly seeks by every mean to perplex and disquiet the souls of the people of God.

b. It may be occasioned also by inattention on the part of believers to themselves, and to divine truths; not distinguishing between the essence and the effects of faith.

c. It may further be occasioned by this: The believer examining his heart discovers indeed many things which resemble the operations of the Spirit; but at the same time he discerns many sins and corruptions, which he believes cannot be consistent with grace. Hence he is afraid to determine any thing favourable with respect to his state.

d. Lastly, it may be occasioned principally by this,—that the Spirit of God imparts not sufficient light to the soul to enable it to discover with clearness, that it possesses true grace.

C. In what manner does a soul conduct itself, in order that it may, on good grounds, be assured of faith? We reply, thus: The Christian goes alone; he is impressed with a sense of his being in the presence of an omniscient God; he views the business in which he is engaged to be of the last importance, on which depend eternal things; he seeks to have his mind composed; he beseeches God to impart his

light to him, and shed abroad his gracious influence. He then,

a. Lays before him all the marks of grace, and strictly examines each of them.

b. He next makes a conscientious enquiry whether any of those marks are applicable to himself. And here the Christian deals with his heart in the most free and faithful manner; and addressing his conscience, he says, "Come, let us reason together. "Before this time thou wast viewed as mine enemy, "when thou broughtest thine accusations against me; "but I now consider thee as my real friend, while "thou performest thine office in faithfulness. I wish "not to deceive myself. Declare to me in the presence of the all-seeing God, what is the real situation of my soul. Canst thou testify against me, "that *I have never as yet been brought to see my true character?* Have I not seen my misery, pollution, "and *guilt?* Does not the dreadful view of these "things fill my soul with distress, sorrow, and "shame? Art not thou a witness of my tears, my "wrestlings, my complaints, my earnest cries to "God for grace? Has not God enabled me to see "that IN JESUS, yea, IN JESUS ALONE, salvation "with eternal glory are to be found? Has he not "become precious to my soul? Has he not become "the supreme object of my love? Have not my desires after him been strong and insatiable—*in-* "much that the language of my heart has been, I "must have Jesus, whatever it cost me? Did not "those desires make me to leave all, and to seek "him in secret with many tears? Yes. When Jesus "permitted me to behold his arms widely extended "to embrace me in love, and to hear his voice addressing me in this encouraging language, *Come*

“unto me, thou who art labouring, weary, and heavy laden, I will give you rest? Did I not cast myself into his arms? Have I not received him as *my all* and in all, with full purpose of heart to leave the ways of folly, and to walk in the paths of life? Is not my heart united in love to all that fear the Lord; and that especially, because God by his Spirit dwells and works in them, and because they are adorned with the image of God? Yes. Can I not say, although they be poor and despised by the world, I am the companion of those that love precious Christ?”

The Christian examining himself in this manner, and appealing thus to conscience, receives a testimony according to truth; and although he may be accused, in some particulars, of deficiencies, yet what respects the existence of faith, conscience passes a favourable verdict; and thus the believer has boldness and confidence in the presence of his Father.

c. But because the believer is apt to distrust himself, and is afraid that perhaps all those experiences may not be genuine, he next proceeds to *compare his own exercises with those of tried and experienced Christians*. He makes particular enquiry of them as to their exercises. He opens his heart to them, and if he find his exercises and theirs to agree, he then concludes that it is the same spirit which is working in him and in them, seeing both he and they have been led in the same way. A conduct like this tends greatly to establish and confirm the people of God, when doubting whether they are united to Christ, and heirs of his salvation.

d. But to become fully assured, there remains one way still open which must also be mentioned. The soul that is deeply impressed with the danger of de-

ceiving itself, goes with all its distress and doubts into the presence of the omniscient God, and falling down before him, thus exclaims: "Lord, thou art witness of every thing that has ever passed in my mind, all my exercises and all my experiences are naked to thine eye. *If there be any wicked way in me, discover it to me, and lead me in the way everlasting. And if the work wrought in me be in truth, declare that it is thy staff, thy bracelet, and thy ring*—and witness with my spirit that I am a child of God."

D. But HOW does the SPIRIT OF GOD co-operate with us in producing the assurance of faith? For although the heart CONDEMN us not, yet the Spirit of God must witness with our spirits. The Holy Spirit is active with respect to all those points which constitute assurance.

a. With respect to THE MARKS which the Scriptures lay down, as evidences of a gracious state.—He enables the believer to obtain a clear and distinct apprehension of them, and causes him to see that all those things which are considered as evidences of grace must be experienced, if ever he shall be happy. He points out what it is that truly constitutes a person a Christian, lest one should conceive too high or too low an opinion of the attainments of a child of God, and thus either be in danger of desponding, or induced to become careless and indifferent.

b. With respect to the EXPERIENCES OF THE HEART, the Spirit is also active, thus:—He not only produces all the graces in the soul, but excites them, and makes the exercises of the believer lively when he is about to give him the assurance of faith. He leads the soul to see its misery by nature. He creates at that time in the Christian a hunger and

thirst after Jesus. He makes him bold to take refuge beneath the shadow of his wings. He inflames him with love to God,—and makes him anxiously desire to evidence that love in a holy walk and conversation.

c. Upon this the Holy Spirit enables the believer to draw this delightful conclusion: “ I find to be in
“ me all that which the word of God says I must
“ experience, and therefore I am a child of God,
“ and an heir of eternal life.” But it must be here remarked, that this determination with respect to one’s state is not always so easily made.

Sometimes it is made with great *fear* and *concern*. It is as if the Christian dared not go so far as to conclude favourably with respect to himself. He must indeed confess that God has dealt graciously with him; but still the language of his heart constantly is—O! what an unhappy, what a wretched creature would I be, if now I have been deceiving myself, and continue believing myself to be a true Christian, to a dying day, and then to find that my hope hath been but the *hope of the hypocrite*, which God hath said *shall* perish.

Sometimes the Holy Spirit enables the believer to come to this sweet conclusion with much composure and calmness of mind. His affections are not greatly elevated, but with a believing heart he confides in the word of God; and comparing his state with what is therein recorded, he exclaims, “ I dare
“ not, I cannot, I may not deny it, that the Lord
“ has shown mercy to my soul. He has of a truth
“ quickened me, who once was dead in trespasses and in
“ sins. I would be unfaithful to my heavenly Father, were I to ascribe to the energies of nature all
“ that my soul has experienced.”

Sometimes it pleases the Holy Spirit, when the believer is brought to make a determination as to his state, to *elevate the affections* to a very high degree. Hence he experiences uncommon joy and satisfaction. He is filled with admiration that God would condescend to look on a creature so vile, so unworthy. Now *tears*, an external mark of the love he bears to Jesus, begin to flow, and now of a new he devotes himself to the Lord and to his service, to be his, and to seek to glorify him for ever.

Sometimes also the believer is enabled to draw the above conclusion in the experience of the EXTRAORDINARY WITNESSING OF THE SPIRIT,—whereby he is as it were overwhelmed with a sense of divine love. Now Jesus takes him in his arms, and embraces him;—now he gives the Christian a *seal* as an evidence of his being a child of God. The Spirit of God calls this, *the eating of the hidden manna*, and the *receiving of the white stone*, on which is found inscribed *that new name which no one knows but he that receiveth it*, Rev. ii. 17. And is not this to be satisfied with the *fatness of God's house*, and to be made to drink of the rivers of his pleasure?

At this time also the Spirit imparts to the believer such a full radiance of knowledge, that *he beholds with open face the glory of the Lord*, and is enraptured with the bright prospect before him. The perfections of God displayed in the work of redemption are now discovered perfectly to harmonize, and with an extacy produced by the delightful view, he sings,

“ ’Twas WISDOM form'd the vast design,

“ To ransom us when lost,

“ And LOVE's unfathomable mine

“ Provided all the cost.

- " STRICT JUSTICE, with approving look,
 " The holy covenant seal'd ;
 " And TRUTH and POWER undertook
 " The whole should be fulfill'd.
 " TRUTH, WISDOM, JUSTICE, POW'R and LOVE,
 " In all their glory shone,
 " When Jesus left the courts above,
 " And dy'd to save his own.
 " TRUTH, WISDOM, JUSTICE, POW'R and LOVE,
 " Are equally display'd,
 " Now Jesus reigns enthron'd above,
 " Our advocate and head."

(Newton.)

Yes, at this time the Spirit draws the curtain, so that the believer gets a view of heaven itself, as the blissful place in which he is for ever to dwell, and obtains a prelibation of that happiness which is in reserve for him after death. Will not the experience of this make him to cry out—"Are the first-fruits of heaven so refreshing to my soul? what will it be when I shall enjoy the full harvest of delight! when I shall be swallowed up in the ocean of divine love and all-sufficiency; when I shall see God *eye to eye and face to face*, and be perfectly holy as he is holy! Now I only *walk by faith*, then I shall know what it is to LIVE *by sight*."

See thus briefly elucidated THE NATURE of the assurance of faith, and the MANNER in which it is acquired.

IV. We must now, agreeably to our FOURTH general head, endeavour to excite the children of God to *strive* after the attainment of assurance. And here it must be remarked, that our observations have not so much a respect to the extraordinary assurance just

described, as to that which is *ordinary*. To enjoy this is so desirable and precious, that one would scarcely think that any thing to awaken the Christian on this head were necessary. But as there are many sincere followers of Christ who are *sitting in darkness*, and *see no light*; whose souls are oppressed by doubt, and are filled with sore distress by reason of their uncertainty with regard to their interest in Christ, it will be useful to make the following observations.

1. Has not every person a *desire after knowledge*, and a wish to be informed with respect to things which will in any wise contribute to his present felicity? If he have some distant expectation of acquiring a great estate by inheritance, what labour will he conceive to be too great in order to ascertain with certainty that his name is in the Testament?

Do the men of the world thus act with respect to things of a temporal nature? and is it not of the last importance to thee, believer, that thou shouldst seek to obtain that which is so immediately connected with thy spiritual comfort and advantage? It is a fact, that having faith in the Lord Jesus, thou wilt arrive at last in heaven, although thou never attainest to the full assurance of faith. But if thou goest on thy way, doubting as to thy state, having thy soul *cast down* and disquieted within thee, can the contemplation of those blissful mansions afford thee joy and delight? or will thy soul long to enter those abodes of the just? We conceive not.

2. Every man is inclined to live in the enjoyment of contentment and comfort—And is this, believer, thy desire? To be assured of faith will promote both: For what can contribute more to make thee content in whatever state thou art, or what adminis-

ter more to thy joys, than the reflection that on Scripture grounds thou mayst say, “ An all-sufficient
 “ God is my portion, even now whilst I am sojourn-
 “ ing in this valley of tears, amidst all the vicissi-
 “ tudes I meet with in life. I can meditate on death
 “ without dismay : For by means of death I shall be
 “ brought into the immediate presence of my Jesus.
 “ At death my joys will be supreme, and therefore
 “ in the prospect of it, I can exult in this triumphant
 “ language of the apostle, *O death, where is thy sting?*
 “ *O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death*
 “ *is sin, and the strength of sin is the law : But thanks*
 “ *be to God, which giveth us the victory through our*
 “ *Lord Jesus Christ.*” But to be continually in a
 state of doubt and uncertainty will deprive thee of
 all comfort, and thy days will be passed in the ex-
 perience of disquietude.

3. Satan, who is an enemy to thy happiness, and envies thee the eternal felicity which awaits thee, is constantly seeking to lead thee from thy God. But, believer, being assured of thy faith, thou wilt quit thyself like a man, and be strong in repelling his fiery darts.

4. Hast thou a desire of progressing in holiness? Assurance is the best mean to obtain that end. For until thou art assured, thou canst not be grateful to God for grace bestowed upon thee in Christ. It is true thou mayst thank God for having appointed a Mediator, and revealed a plan of salvation ; but will not thy gratitude be expressed in far higher strains, when thou canst add the term ME, and say, “ *I thank*
 “ *thee, Father, who hath made ME meet for the inheri-*
 “ *tance of the saints in light, Col. i. 12. Blessed be*
 “ *the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who*
 “ *hath blessed ME with all spiritual blessings in Christ,*”

Eph. i. 3. Would it not have the blessed effect of inflaming thy heart with love to God, if thou wert to contemplate him as having *loved THEE with an everlasting love*, and *according to the multitude of his tender mercies, blotted out all THY transgressions*?

5. Assurance will enable thee to use the means of grace with more profit and advantage: For now by the prevalence of unbelief, and doubts with respect to thy case, the admonitions and exhortations of the gospel are often not regarded. Thy cry constantly is, “Who can tell whether I may reckon myself “among the number of the children of God? Surely then those admonitions and exhortations are not “for me.” Were it not for thy doubts, thy soul would enjoy higher degrees of consolation, and be more refreshed in the use of the seals of the covenant, especially the Lord’s Supper; for then thou wouldst consider them as the pledges of thy Father’s love to thee. Did not doubts prevail, and were not thy soul tossed to and fro by the tempest of uncertainty, thou wouldst exhibit a life of usefulness, thou wouldst be active by thine advice and instruction in leading thy fellow men in the ways of religion and true happiness. And hence it is, that thou dost not progress in the divine life thyself, and art of little use or advantage to thy fellow Christians.

6. By for ever doubting of thy case, thou bringest an evil report of the way which leads to the celestial Canaan. When the world see the people of God *walking mournfully before the Lord of hosts*, they are impressed with an idea that the service of God is a hard service, attended with a countenance expressive of a heart depressed and filled with sorrow. How reasonable then, believer, is it, that thou seek to remove the prejudices which the world have imbibed

against the divine and precious religion of thy Jesus, by a walk which manifests the supreme delights which it affords to all its votaries; and thus allure them to the divine Redeemer.

7. Assurance contributes to the advantage of the Christian in every situation in which he may be placed in the present life.

A. IN PROSPERITY. *When the secret of God is upon thy tabernacle, and thou wasthest thy steps with butter, by being assured of thy faith, thou wilt be enabled to view these blessings as agreeable additions to the better blessings of the covenant, and to have been dispensed by a compassionate God and Father, in and through the merits of the Saviour. This delightful retrospect will create sentiments of genuine gratitude in thy heart. Dost thou expect, believer, a better portion than this world can afford? Being assured of thy faith, thou wilt find thy heart more weaned from things of time and sense, and disposed not to look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal, 2 Cor. iv. 18.*

B. IN ADVERSITY. To be assured of faith will also make thee patient and submissive when the hand of thy God dispenses severe trials, and his providential acts are such as to bring thee into circumstances most distressing. For being strong in faith thou wilt see that all sublunary things are of uncertain enjoyment, in no wise constitute thy chief good, and are not to be compared with those better and durable treasures which are laid up for thee in heaven. These considerations will induce thee in the worst of times to commit to thy covenant God all thy concerns, and cause thee thus to reason with thyself:

“ My Father knows what is best for me—It is therefore very possible that it will contribute more to my advantage to be kept in the furnace of affliction, than with others to bask beneath the bright beams of prosperity. *Let him do unto me what seemeth good in his sight !*”

C. In sudden and unexpected emergencies to be assured of thine interest in Christ, will produce an holy stillness in thy soul, and composed by the thought that THY Jesus reigns, thou wilt be able to adapt to thyself the language of David, and with him exultingly to say,—*Though the earth be removed, though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea, though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, and though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof, yet will we not fear; for the Lord is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.*

D. To be assured of thine interest in Christ will enable thee, Christian, to despise the frowns and to rise superior to the reproaches which the men of the world may cast upon thee. For, united to glorious Christ, when the *infidel* sneers, and the enemies of the cross revile, I can triumph in this, that the *Eternal* is my refuge, and underneath me are his everlasting arms,—and that Jesus hath taken me within the bonds of his covenant, adorned my person with his spotless robe, and hereafter will elevate me to a seat on his throne.

E. When thou attainest to an assurance of thy faith, then thou dost first taste the delights, the satisfaction, and supreme pleasure, which vital religion affords. Then first wilt thou commence *rejoicing with joy unspeakable and full of glory* in the IMMACULATE LAMB.

F. Assured of thy faith, CHRISTIAN, thou wilt

be a stranger to the FEARS which the contemplation of DEATH and JUDGMENT would otherwise excite. Both these events, so terrible to the wicked, and so much dreaded by the hypocrite, are to thee who viewest thyself reconciled to God by the death of his Son, sources from which issue streams of joy and delight. It cannot be otherwise; for, having an interest in Christ, thou beholdest DEATH disarmed of his sting, and seest JESUS the future Judge of the world not to be thine enemy, but thy friend, thy surety, thy husband, who in the presence of the assembled universe will own thee as one redeemed by his blood, and say to thee, *Come thou blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for thee from the foundation of the world*, Matt. xxv.

G. If thy faith be vigorous and lively, thou wilt be enabled to bring forth much fruit. It will make thee MEEK and HUMBLE in the presence of thy God, and the language of David when he went in and sat before the Lord, will be the language of thy soul: *O Lord God, who am I, and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto?* 2 Sam. vii. 18. With good old Jacob thou wilt also exclaim, *Lord! I am unworthy of the least of all thy mercies and truth*, Gen. xxxii. 10. It will excite thee often to meditate upon and to seek to comply with the apostolic exhortation, Col. iii. 1, *Seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth.* It will make thee faithful to thy neighbour, and awaken a desire in thee to do every thing in thy power to promote his eternal salvation. It will in a word excite thee to PRUDENCE and CIRCUMSPECTION in thy walk, lest by an opposite con-

duct thou shouldst lose thy wonted boldness and confidence in approaching thy God.

V. Now is there so much comfort and true pleasure arising from a well-grounded assurance? WHENCE IS IT that in our day so small a number of assured Christians are to be met with? This was the FIFTH subject we proposed to investigate.

And why is it so? Reasons can be assigned for it, both on THE PART OF GOD, and ON THE PART OF THE BELIEVER HIMSELF.

1. ON THE PART OF GOD. It pleases the Lord to suffer it to be so,

A. IN ORDER TO DISPLAY HIS DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY IN DISPENSING GRACE. It is his pleasure that ONE enjoy much light and comfort, and that *another* be led in a way of darkness and distress, without assigning any reason for his conduct; and in this it becomes his followers to be silent and to adore.

B. God will have his people kept LOW and HUMBLE, and not exalted on account of grace received. The assurance of faith does not produce pride of heart; yet it is sometimes seen, that by reason of indwelling sin, and temptations from hell, the assured Christian will form too exalted an opinion of himself and of his attainments. Now because God delighteth himself in his humble followers, he will permit DOUBTS, and its companion DARKNESS, to arise, in order to keep them humble.

C. The Lord suffers his people so frequently to want the assurance of faith, ON ACCOUNT OF THE UNGODLY, in order that they may see that to obtain salvation is not so easy a thing as they have been induced to believe. That they may be convinced, agreeably to the declaration of our Lord,

that *Strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life.* The ungodly man, when he sees believers, who perhaps have been long travelling the celestial road, discovering such evidences of fear and doubts with respect to their future state, there is a probability of his being brought to reason thus with himself: "What must be my final doom? *If the* "righteous are SCARCELY saved, *where shall I ap-* "pear?"

2. But do there exist on the part of God such wise and holy reasons, that so few of his dear children attain to assurance? We further remark, that causes may be assigned also ON THE PART OF BELIEVERS THEMSELVES, why this assurance which is so desirable to all Christians, is so seldom enjoyed.

A. One cause is, that they do not DEVOTE SUFFICIENT TIME TO ACQUIRE THE KNOWLEDGE OF DIVINE TRUTHS, by which they would form to themselves proper views of the nature of faith and of assurance, as also of other interesting truths of religion. It is because their knowledge of these is contracted and superficial, that they are so often tossed like the ship in the midst of the tempestuous ocean, and experience so much disquietude in the divine life.

B. Many Christians seem to CHERISH DESPONDING SENTIMENTS OF THEMSELVES. They are for ever complaining with respect to their state, as if the essence of Christianity consisted therein. Remove any one difficulty with which they are oppressed, and instantly many others arise.

C. Many LIVE TOO INATTENTIVE TO THE SECRET DUTIES OF RELIGION. They engage not enough in holy meditation, and are too neglectful of *wrestling with God* alone in prayer. They

may pray indeed, but it is not with that engagedness and ardour which the nature of the duty requires. They frequently content themselves with having gone through the exercise, and feel not that distress which ought to pierce their inmost souls; when *seeking* they do not find. And may not a conduct like this cause Jehovah to withhold from his people the light of his countenance, and induce him to manifest to them his displeasure?

D. Many Christians live WITHOUT THAT CIRCUMSPECTION, CARE, AND TENDERNESS IN THEIR conversation with the world, which is so necessary. They do not exercise that wisdom and prudence *in the midst of a wicked and perverse generation*, on which our holy religion so much insists. They become too conformable to the world, both in their words and actions. They do not come out boldly for God and his cause. Now whenever persons of this description come to a sense of these sins, distress seizes them, and painful anxiety preys upon them. Now their language is, “ In what do we differ from the men of the world? Are we not too much conformed to them? If we were under the influences of the Spirit of grace, it could never have been thus with us. Our case is doubtful,— we had hoped that all was well with us. But now, alas, we find we had fondly cherished hopes without any foundation whatever for so doing.” And here, believers, how great cause have you to be ashamed at a conduct so incompatible with the religion you profess! What reason have you to be humbled for having given the world so much reason to imbibe prejudices against the PURE principles of Christianity, and for having robbed your own souls of the consolations and joys of which assured Chris-

tians participate! Holiness is the surest way to obtain assurance. If God's children walk tenderly in his presence, and display in all their deportment an affection and regard for him, he will observe a similar part, and by gracious manifestations of his complacency, display to their souls the pleasure he takes in them. And although your want of prudence and circumspection in your lives shall not keep you ultimately out of heaven, yet it is this which makes the road leading thither thorny and irksome.

VI. Do any then enquire, WHAT ARE THE MEANS WHICH CHRISTIANS MUST EMPLOY IN ORDER TO ATTAIN TO AN ASSURANCE WHICH IS FIRM AND WELL-GROUNDED? This was in the SIXTH place, what was proposed to be shown.

1. Is thine IGNORANCE, believer, one of the causes of thy living in a state of doubt, as to thine interest in Christ? BE VIGILANT, and ENDEAVOUR by EVERY MEAN to OBTAIN a CLEAR, ACCURATE, and DISTINCT KNOWLEDGE of DIVINE TRUTHS, ESPECIALLY OF THOSE WHICH RESPECT *the nature* of FAITH and assurance. Thou dost perhaps often exercise faith, and thou knowest it not because of thine ignorance as it regards its nature and essential acts. If thou wert aware that faith consists in one's running and flying to Christ, and examined thy heart by the word of God, thou couldst not avoid acknowledging, that thou wert a possessor of it.

2. COMPARE NOT THINE EXERCISES WITH GREAT AND MORE ADVANCED CHRISTIANS, and then think that because thou hast not experienced the same, that therefore thou hast no grace. No: rather consider, that among the people of God are found BRUISED REEDS as well as the STATELY

CEDARS OF LEBANON. Those whose faith is weak, as well as those who are STRONG IN THE LORD; and that those who are feeble among the flock are as dear to God as those whose attainments have been great.

3. LEARN TO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN THY STATE AND THY FRAMES. Thy state has always been good, from the moment thou first believedst, but thy frames frequently change. Is thy soul in any respect awakened and inspirited? Thy frames are also lively, and thou feelest a degree of assurance. But is thy heart lifeless, and as it were unanimated? Then all is doubt and distrust, and thy mind, which was elevated by hope before, becomes depressed by fear, and cleaves to the dust. Are these transitions proper? Would it not contribute more to the glory of God, and to thine own peace, wert thou to reason thus in every situation of thy life? “ True, I have
“ been but little exercised in my mind. This heart
“ has often experienced much dullness, much stu-
“ pidity, much deadness with regard to things hea-
“ venly and divine. But is not God always immu-
“ tably the same? Will he not therefore make good
“ his word, and *turn his hand on the little ones?*”

4. OFTEN EXAMINE THYSELF FAITHFULLY, as in the presence of the Lord, in regard to the marks of grace which, in the preceding part of this discourse, have been laid down. Ask thyself, saying, “ O my soul, wilt thou dare to assert, that I have
“ not experienced at least some of those things which
“ God in his word declares that those do experience
“ who are his adopted children?” Bring thy case before the Lord in earnest and importunate prayer, and say, “ Lord, I would not willingly deceive my-

“ self, and I would be equally indisposed to *despise*
 “ the day of small things, or estimate at too low a rate
 “ the operations of thy Spirit, as if they were effects
 “ which could be produced by the energies of my
 “ natural powers. I have of a truth been exercised
 “ in such a way, and experienced things which could
 “ have been wrought in me by no human power.
 “ Surely it is thy work,—O enable me to believe
 “ it!”

5. UNBOSOM THYSELF to those of thy friends and acquaintance, who by reason of the improvement they have made, through grace, in divine knowledge, can be instrumental to render thee support and assistance. It is not intended, by giving thee this advice, to insinuate that *all* thy friends, even those who are pious, should be told the particulars of thy case. This might work an injury. ALL are not capable of being bosom friends. Some by their ignorance, imprudence, and dogmatical opinions, or by a want of knowing how to feel for the woes of others, and to sympathize with them in distresses, are more adapted to depress the mind than to elevate its hopes. Communicate the secrets of thy heart to those who, having been taught themselves by experience and much observation, the ways which the ETERNAL holds with his people, CAN, and who, having a heart inclined to commiserate those in distresses, and at the same time to *glorify their Father in heaven*, WILL deal in a tender, affectionate, and faithful manner with thee.

6. BE CONSTANT AND LIVELY IN THE EXERCISE OF FAITH; hunger and thirst more after Christ; run, hasten, fly every day with increased vigour unto him with all those burdens, beneath the pressing weight of which thou art nigh to sinking.

Dost thou fall into sin? let his blood be again thy refuge. In this way thou wouldst attain to a full persuasion that thou hast received Jesus, and that thy *soul's desire is to the remembrance of his name, to act and to live for him.*

7. RENEW daily before the Lord thy determination, through grace, *to be his for ever*, and renouncing sin and the world, to cleave to him alone.

8. Above all, ENDEAVOUR, through grace, to approve thyself to thy God, with the tenderness and affection of a child. Be on thy guard against a walk *conformable to this world*. Let it be seen, by every act of thy life, and by thy pious deportment, that thou *art not of the world*, but belong *to that people whose God is the Lord*. It is because believers do not conduct themselves with that tenderness towards their Father that the scriptures every where enjoin, that he is pleased to withhold from them the light of his countenance, and suffers them *to go mourning as without the sun*.

9. GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGE the smallest degrees of grace which may have been implanted in thy soul. For the smallest as well as the greatest have cost the precious Jesus his blood;—both are the almighty work of the Holy Spirit. Not to acknowledge all the blessings which thy Father dispenses to thee, is to reflect dishonour upon him. Adapt then to thyself the language which the father of the sick child mentioned in the gospel, addressed to Jesus—“*Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief.*”

10. Never be so anxious to obtain the assurance of thy faith, as to increase daily in holiness. Let thy soul seek after the joys and consolations of religion, in such a way as to evidence that it is supremely solicitous to promote the honour of thy co-

venant God, and to make suitable returns, by a holy conversation, for the grace bestowed upon thee. Be assured, that God will not leave himself without a witness of his love and faithfulness.

11. Lastly, IF THY HEAVENLY FATHER COMMUNICATE TO THEE ANY LIGHT, CHERISH IT WITH THE GREATEST CARE; prize it most highly; be thankful for it; be always *meek* and humble; for frames like these are well pleasing to thy God.

See thus, what we had to observe on the great doctrine of the ASSURANCE OF FAITH.—We must now endeavour in a more particular manner to improve the subject, first with a view to the conviction of those WHO AS YET ARE IN A STATE OF NATURE, and then TO THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF THOSE WHO ARE THE CHOSEN AND REDEEMED OF THE LORD.

Is it asked, What advantage can natural men derive from what has been said, since *they know not the things of the Spirit of God*? We reply, It may serve to make them form high and exalted sentiments of the principles of Christianity, and create in them at least secret desires to be in a state in which they may live comfortably and die happily. It may be attended also with this advantage, to convince them that they have been at ease in their sins, and have fondly indulged themselves with a hope of heaven, while there was not the least foundation for it. For if to a child of God the assurance of faith be a matter of such importance, certainly THEY have abundant reason to search their hearts with the greatest care, especially before they appear at the table of the Lord, *lest they eat and drink judgment to themselves*.

Come then, infatuated sinner, who art passing through life with so much unconcern! we address

ourselves not immediately to thee who art living perfectly at thy ease in the commission of open and public acts of sin; who art crying *peace, peace*, and dost not experience any alarm when the *terrors of the Lord* are founded in thine ears;—but we direct this address particularly TO THEE who art *moral* in thy conversation, and deportest thyself externally as religious; TO THEE we speak, whom Satan is lulling to sleep, and whom he entices to found a hope on that which is not warranted by the word of God. On what basis dost thou erect thy hope, that Jesus is thy Saviour, and God thy God and portion? To this thou must carefully attend. Who can tell, but it may please the Lord to give thee a feeling sense of thine awful situation before it be ETERNALLY too late? Why thinkest thou that all is well with thee?

1. Is it because THOU HAST A CLEAR AND EXTENSIVE KNOWLEDGE OF DIVINE TRUTHS? Be assured, that this is no *solid foundation* for thee to rest upon. Although a person be a minister of the gospel, and be able to display the greatest ability in exhibiting its doctrines in their connection, with the greatest perspicuity and precision, yet he is not to be esteemed a Christian merely on this account. For hear the sentiments which Paul addressed on this head to the church of Christ at Corinth: *Though I had all knowledge, and had not charity, I am nothing*, 1 Cor. xiii. 2. Who is able to ascertain the degree of knowledge at which Judas arrived? Was he not an apostle of the divine Jesus? Did he not enjoy the advantage of receiving instruction at the mouth of Christ himself? Yet scripture declares, that he was *a son of perdition*. Unless the truths which are inculcated in the word be applied to the heart, we

cannot rest our hopes of salvation upon the mere knowledge of them.

2. Or dost thou lay it as thy foundation, that THOU LEADEST A MORAL LIFE, that thou hast MADE A PROFESSION of the religion of Christ, or that THE PIOUS are those whom thou hast selected as thy companions? All these things are very good, and they may be means of bringing thee ultimately to God; but they are far, very far from being sufficient grounds for thee to rest upon. We have in the preceding lecture shown to what lengths a person may go, and still be lost for ever.

3. Or dost thou indulge the hope that thou hast received grace, BECAUSE GOD IN HIS PROVIDENCE HATH BLESSED THEE IN TEMPORAL THINGS? To bask beneath the meridian sun of prosperity does not render thee more pleasing in the eyes of him *who seeth not as man seeth*. Neither maintain a belief that thy state is gracious, because the Eternal visiteth thee with afflictions. Some have done this, putting an improper construction on that saying of Paul, Heb. xii. 6, *Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth*. O miserable foundations for immortals to rest their eternal concerns upon! Does not scripture expressly declare, that *There is one event to the righteous and to the wicked; to him that feareth God, and to him that feareth him not*. Doth God, O sinner, bless thee with riches, and elevate thee to the seat of honour? this is all thy portion, and a poor, very poor portion it is! Or doth the Almighty cause thee to spend thy days in bitterness? doth he visit thee with poverty, and bereave thee of thy nearest friends and relatives? Thou canst not be assured that these trials, in thy present unconverted state, are any thing more than *the beginning of everlasting sorrows*.

4. Or art thou saying to thyself, I HAVE BEEN BORN OF CHRISTIAN PARENTS, EDUCATED IN A CHRISTIAN LAND, AND FROM MY YOUTH UP HAVE HAD SERIOUS IMPRESSIONS OF RELIGION; MY PARENTS HAVE OFTEN PRAYED FOR ME? Are not these advantages on which I may rest my hope? To have had such advantages was indeed most desirable. By being thus situated in life, thou hast probably been preserved from many sins into which otherwise thou wouldst have fallen. But thy parents possessed not the power to change thy heart. Grace is not an entailed inheritance. ISHMAEL was the son of a pious parent, of Abraham the father of the faithful, and yet we no where read of his conversion. ESAU was the son of godly Isaac, and yet scripture assures us, *that he was hated*. HAM who was accursed, was the son of Noah, so celebrated in the inspired writings for his piety and faithfulness in his generation.

5. Or dost thou flatter thyself that thy hopes are built on a foundation much more certain? a foundation which the word of God itself proposes, THAT THOU LOVEST THOSE WHO LIVE GODLY IN CHRIST JESUS? The apostle John indeed declares, that *Who-soever is born of God loveth the brethren*. But is it a fact that thou hast this love? Come, let us reason together on this point: Why dost thou love the Lord's people? Perhaps thou art pleased with them on account of some benefit which thou derivatest from their acquaintance, or because thou findest in them a similarity of natural disposition, or because they are friendly and discreet. But is it true that thou lovest them because they *are made conformable to the image of Christ*? Dost thou esteem them as highly, when in faithfulness they warn thee of thy sin and danger,

as when they do thee a kindness, and express themselves agreeably to thy wishes? We may SEEM to love the followers of Christ, and PROFESS sentiments of esteem for faithful ministers, and yet be excluded the kingdom. Did not Herod listen with apparent delight to the preaching of John the Baptist? Did he not profess to esteem him highly?—But who is ignorant of what scripture so expressly declares concerning him;—that he lived without God in the world, and died in his sins?

6. Or dost thou say,—I cannot possibly miss of heaven; FOR I HAVE RECEIVED ASSURANCES THAT MY STATE IS GOOD, *even from Christ's ministers themselves*, when in former periods of sickness they have visited me. THEY MUST KNOW what is necessary for a person to have, and certainly they would not wittingly deceive.

We can easily conceive, that if Christ's ministers are not faithful in their visitations of the sick, that they may prove instrumental of making persons to rest on foundations of sand. It is not an easy thing to attend those on their sick bed, who cherish the hope that all is well, and are so anxious to have their hearts comforted. They catch at every word of encouragement that is spoken, and say, Surely I can apply this to myself.

But,—sinner,—what will it avail thee that ministers have assured thee that thy peace is made with God. They only judge of thy case according to thine own representation of it; and address thee in terms which are encouraging, because of the favourable statement which thou thyself hast given them of the exercises of thy heart, and of the tenor of thy life. They are not searchers of the heart, nor can they try the reins of the children of men; and be-

lieve it, that those who truly fear God neither CAN nor WILL ever conclude that their state is gracious, merely because a fellow creature says so. They go to God himself, and cry, *Lord, say thou to my soul, I am thy salvation.*

7. Or it may be that thou reliefst upon FORMER CONVICTIONS, and SUPPOSEST in consequence, that these have wrought a change in thine heart. But this is delusive hope; for perhaps thou wert before openly wicked and profane, or thou hadst been guilty of some sin, the atrocity of which has greatly alarmed thy conscience, and hence thou hast been induced to determine upon leading a better life. Besides, it may be that these convictions have not been lasting; that they have not been accompanied by saving conversion, and thou hast become far worse than before: and hence, instead of hoping that salvation and eternal glory will ultimately be thy portion, thou hast reason to fear that thy condemnation will be the more severe. Is it then true that thou hast never builded on the ROCK CHRIST? What misery and wretchedness awaits thee! Hast thou any right to the Lord's Supper? Under present circumstances oughtest thou not to be exhorted not to approach the table of the Lord? Rather go to God in Christ; mourn before him thy guilt, and the breach which sin hath made between thee and him; and plead, with earnestness plead, that HE whose work it is, would *lead thee in the way everlasting* before thou openest thine eyes in hell, *where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.*

But, PEOPLE OF GOD, ye who have NEVER yet attained to an assurance of your faith,—to your case this lecture is particularly adapted. Seek to be assured that ye are in the faith; and now, when you

are about preparing to meet your Redeemer at his table, let not your souls be oppressed by doubts and fears. We have laid down principles selected from the word of God for self-examination. Although you find not in yourselves ALL the marks of grace, endeavour to see whether you have experienced the chief of them. Do you distrust your former exercises, that they have not been genuine and evangelical? Examine now whether you do not feel sincere desires after Christ; whether you do not purpose in your heart to live before God in the light of the living, and to renounce the service and slavery of sin. Can ye appeal to him *who seeth in secret, and who knoweth all things*, and say, Lord Jesus, *thou art all our desire*, and the full purpose of our heart is, as thou shalt enable us *to die unto sin*, and to live unto righteousness? Then, though ye feel not an assured confidence; yet ye are those whom Jesus *hath loved with an everlasting love*; and it is your privilege not only, but your *duty*, to draw nigh to his table, and with his followers to commemorate his dying love. Will not, O believers! your Jesus *be with you* as he hath said, and give you, with the external signs, the internal seal of his Spirit?

And ye WHO ARE ASSURED of your interest in the precious Redeemer, O how far passing all description the happiness of your state! Ye have not only grace, but ye know that ye have it. And is not this GRACE *for grace*? How pleasant to walk in the light, while so many proceed on their journey surrounded by darkness! Praise the triune God, your covenant God, for what he hath of free, sovereign, and unmerited grace, done for you. Seek, in the use of every appointed mean, and in the strength of your Jesus, to preserve the assurance which he

hath given you of your union to him. Do all in your power to become instrumental of binding up the broken in heart, and of encouraging thy fellow-Christians, whose souls, as David expresses it in the forty-second psalm, are disquieted within them. Go with the confidence of children to the table which your Father in heaven, your Jesus, hath prepared for you. Long for the returns of those seasons when it shall be spread, and when you shall sit down thereat, and *in the eating of bread and drinking of wine*, devote yourselves to your Saviour God. Long too for the arrival of that glorious day when with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob you shall enjoy the sweet repast which is prepared for all the followers of the Lamb; when, seated at his table above, your assurance will no more be interrupted; when you enter into yonder blissful regions, where your Jesus appears exalted at the right hand of his Father. Then it will be your employment throughout eternity, to serve the Eternal in infinitely more exalted strains—Then hope will be changed into fruition, and faith for ever be lost in sight.

A M E N.

THE

PIOUS COMMUNICANT.

Lecture IV.

IN WHICH THE *REASONS* ARE ASSIGNED WHY SO MANY OF THE CHILDREN OF GOD, ON THEIR WAY TO HEAVEN, ATTAIN NOT TO THE ASSURANCE OF FAITH; AND THE *GROUND*S OF *ENCOURAGEMENT* ARE EXHIBITED, WITH A VIEW TO AFFORD SUPPORT AND COMFORT TO THEIR DESPONDING SOULS.



HAVING, in the preceding lecture, expressed our sentiments on THE NATURE OF ASSURANCE, and URGED it as a DUTY upon the people of God TO SEEK to attain to it: we conceive it now to be proper, to lay before you some of the principal reasons, WHY so many true believers, on their way to glory, remain WITHOUT AN ASSURANCE of their having a saving interest in Christ; in full confidence that, the Eternal smiling upon our feeble attempt, our ENDEAVOURS to remove the DESPONDING thoughts which they entertain of themselves, and to promote their *joy and peace in believing*, will not be fruitless.

In the present lecture we propose,

I. To shew that DOUBTS and FEARS may be ex-

perienced by those who are in a gracious state, and that it is no uncommon thing for real believers to be exercised by them.

II. To point out the principal sources whence those doubts and fears proceed.

III. To mention some of those MEANS, in the use of which souls which are in doubt, and filled with distress with respect to their eternal concerns, may be brought to enjoy divine consolation on their journey through this wilderness to the heavenly Canaan.

IV. The lecture will conclude with some ADVICE and DIRECTIONS as to the manner in which true Christians, under such distressing circumstances, ought to conduct themselves, that they may approach the table of the Lord acceptably to God and profitably to themselves.

FIRST. That the children of God who are truly in a gracious state MAY DOUBT and be oppressed BY FEAR, lest Christ be not their Saviour, and they may have never savingly believed in him, and that MANY of them are found in a situation so peculiarly distressing, is demonstrated by the following arguments :

1. There are PLAIN DECLARATIONS in the word of God, which teach us, that the *way that leadeth unto life is narrow*, Matt. vii. 13, 14; that *the righteous are SCARCELY saved*, 1 Pet. iv. 18; and *that we must strive to enter in.*—Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that shall be saved? and he said unto them, *Strive to enter in at the strait gate, for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able*, Luke xiii. 24.

2. The same oracles of divine Truth INFORM us, that in some believers faith is *weak*, in others strong;

that among the children of God there are those who may be compared to *bruised reeds*, and others who are likened to the stately *cedars of Lebanon*. Hence, whilst some triumph by faith, others are found who entertain desponding thoughts with respect to their case, and go through life doubting of their interest in Christ's purchased salvation.

3. The EXAMPLES which are recorded in scripture of particular saints who have been in great doubt, and who have been oppressed with much fear concerning their state, clearly settles the point in question. David himself prayed, Psalm li. 12, *Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with thy free Spirit*; and in Psalm xxx. 7, he addresses the Eternal thus: *Lord, by thy favour thou hast made my mountain to stand strong: thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled*. Hear the language of Asaph, Psalm lxxvii. 3, 7, 8, 9, 10, *I remembered God, and was troubled; I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed. Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? doth his promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies? And I said, this is my INFIRMITY*. What representation did Heman make of his case? Psalm lxxxviii. 14, 15, 16, *Lord, why castest thou off my soul? why hidest thou thy face from me? I am afflicted and ready to die from my youth up. While I suffer thy terrors I am distracted; thy fierce wrath goeth over me; thy terrors have cut me off*. Attend also to the complaint of the church, Psalm cii. 4, 9. *My heart is smitten and withered like grass, so that I forget to eat my bread. By reason of the voice of my groaning, my bones cleave to my skin. I am like a pelican of the wilderness; I am like an owl of the*

desert. I watch and am like a sparrow alone upon the house-top. Mine enemies reproach me all the day, and they that are mad against me are sworn against me. For I have eaten ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping.

4. THE EXPERIENCE OF BELIEVERS IN ALL AGES CONFIRMS our assertion. Many of God's children, when first brought from a state of nature to a state of grace, receive much light and enjoy much peace; especially if God's Spirit hath drawn them to Jesus with the cords of love. But let them travel on the road a little farther; let God withhold the influences of his grace; let Satan discover his enmity; let, in a word, their corruptions, which, in the height of their first love and zeal, seemed to have been altogether subdued, again manifest themselves;—then their doubts and fears arise; then they *fit in darkness*, and their language is, “I am afraid that I “have never been sincere, and never felt the power “of religion on my heart.” For Christians of this description have never learnt to *walk by faith*.

Others, from the very commencement of the work of God upon their hearts, live enveloped in great darkness.—They dare not believe that their convictions have been of the right kind.

Hence then it is a fact, that doubts, fears, and sentiments of a desponding nature, may have place in *God's children*; who may here be viewed, either,

1. As those who are just ENTERING UPON the Christian life, who indeed entertain a hope, that God is working by his Spirit in their hearts, but who constantly are exercised by fear, that they have never been the subjects of special grace: or,

2. As those who have been LONGER ON THE WAY, and have walked beneath the rays emanating

from Jesus, the sun of righteousness, but who at times are *covered* with midnight *darkness*, and are often alarmed lest they shall ultimately be excluded the kingdom of heaven.

The doubts and despondencies, which believers of this last description experience, COME SUDDENLY upon them.—At the very time they are living in fellowship with God, and in the exercise of faith and love, it frequently happens that before they are aware, Satan assaults their souls, injects his fiery darts, and demands—“Thou who callest thyself a believer, “how dost thou know that thou art sincere in thy “professions of religion? What evidence art thou “in possession of that thy faith is genuine?” But it must here be remarked, that by means of the light which, by the illuminating influence of the Spirit, hath beamed in their minds; and being accustomed to live by faith, they soon ascertain the source whence these fiery darts come; and therefore, though for a season their distresses run high, and their hearts may verge towards despondency, yet in the end they will see that all this has been working together for their good, even to *establish their goings* more and more. The truth of this remark was exemplified in the experience of the psalmist. *His anger endureth but a moment; in his favour is life. Weeping, said he, may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.*

3. As those who CONSTANTLY SPEND their days, STRUGGLING BETWEEN HOPE AND FEAR, are always in bitterness, and continually complaining, like persons who labour under a lingering disease, SUCH believers are considered in this lecture. To them, in a peculiar manner, we address ourselves, when,

SECONDLY, We proceed to point out the PRIN-

CIPAL SOURCES whence those doubts and fears arise.

We have said, that doubts and fears have place,

A. In the minds of YOUNG CHRISTIANS, who are first setting out in the ways of religion, and have never experienced any kind of assurance whatever. Wherefore do THEY doubt?

a. Because they are fearful that their CONVICTIONS ARE NOT GENUINE, having never been accompanied with that great distress of mind which they have seen others to experience. Their language is, "Some have had their sins set in order before their eyes in all their aggravated circumstances. They have beheld the Eternal displaying all the terror of majesty; they have seen Jehovah, as one who is infinite in holiness, and who wields in his hand the sword of justice. Hell too with all its horrors has been opened to their view. But these discoveries have never been made to us in such an awful manner, though our sins have been as GREAT, yea, perhaps far surpassing theirs,—though we have spent MUCH of our time in the service of the world, have been ENEMIES to God and his religion, and have gone to the greatest lengths in the ways of sin. Surely it is impossible that we can be converted to God in so easy a manner, when those who are externally *moral* and sober, are made to feel distress and agonies nearly resembling the torments of hell." So that it appears, that they will not dare believe their convictions or conversion genuine, unless the former be as severe as their sins have been enormous.

b. Some, because they are UNABLE TO ASCERTAIN PRECISELY THE TIME AND PLACE when first they met with a change of heart. "Some of

“our acquaintance,” say they, “can tell the day, the hour, the moment, the particular sickness, the sermon, when the Lord touched their hearts. But with these we are altogether unacquainted. We have lived from our youths up, professing the Christian religion, and deporting ourselves as strict moralists; our education has been pious, and our companions, men who feared the Lord. But ah! unto this day we know of no remarkable change which has taken place.” Now when God by his Spirit works in their hearts, they are afraid to view them as gracious operations, especially if that work be carried on in a mild manner, and they are brought over to God and to his service, without having their affections greatly excited. They rather conceive them to be the effects, either of a pious education, of a mild and placid temper, or of a natural aversion to objects of sense. And this unfavourable conclusion with respect to their state is drawn, merely because they cannot fix in their minds on the precise time when they were born again.—It is granted that such persons cannot with ease, at all times, determine their true situation before God; and that they require the clearest marks of grace, when oppressed with doubts and fears, to evince to themselves that they are truly in a gracious state.

c. Again, the doubts and fears of others proceed from this quarter,—THAT they have never experienced an INSTANTANEOUS CHANGE OF HEART. “Under many a sermon,” say they, “our consciences have been awakened;—but we have as often suppressed such awakening. Time after time, God hath knocked at the door of our hearts, but we have not paid due attention to his pressing

“ calls. We might indeed have resolved to live in
 “ a different manner from what we had done before;
 “ but our resolutions were no sooner made than they
 “ were broken, and were never accompanied with an
 “ actual surrender of our souls to God in Christ,
 “ until perhaps months and years had elapsed; when
 “ the Eternal at last proved to be too powerful, over-
 “ came every opposition, and subdued our hearts to
 “ his service.”

Now persons of this description are often greatly in doubt lest the work hath not been done in truth. For again their language is,—“ Were we not as
 “ much convinced, and perhaps more than we are
 “ at present? And behold! all those convictions
 “ have departed, and who can tell but these may
 “ also cease to give us any concern? Perhaps if we
 “ only had the same opportunity offered for sinning,
 “ we would again pursue the same evil courses which
 “ we once did.”

d. Many of God's dear children, especially when they have been but a short time on the way, are distressed and greatly agitated in their minds, lest they MAY HAVE COMMITTED THE SIN AGAINST THE HOLY GHOST; and thus think that it is impossible that their sins should be forgiven them, and consequently, though they mourn before the Lord, pray, intreat, and wrestle with him for grace, it will be in vain, because Christ hath said, Matt. xii. 13, *This sin shall not be forgiven.* In addition to all this, the arch-fiend, who goeth about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour, is generally active, at such times, to persuade them to mention the cause of their distress to no person whatever, it being a sin too atrocious and too awful to be communicated. Hence it comes to pass, that those who are thus assaulted;

long remain in a firm belief, that the unpardonable *sin lieth at their door*; whereas, if they listened not to the delusive suggestions of the adversary, they might soon, very soon, obtain relief from a burden so oppressive.

e. Some, by an apprehension that **THEY ARE NOT THE OBJECTS OF GOD'S ELECTING LOVE**, are constantly exercised by fear that they shall never be saved; they approach near to a state of despondency; they become inactive; *their hands hang down*. For, say they, "As we belong not to the election of grace, our ruin is certain. The decrees of God are absolute and irrevocable, and therefore it is in vain to make any attempt to counteract them."

f. There are others again, more advanced in years, who fear that they shall never obtain salvation, **BECAUSE THEY HAVE WAITED TOO LONG BEFORE THEY COMMENCED SEEKING CHRIST, AND HAVE SPENT THE BEST OF THEIR DAYS IN THE SERVICE OF SIN AND THE WORLD**. These are constantly exclaiming,—“Now it is for ever too late, and it is impossible that God should receive us in mercy, who have so long lived regardless of him, of Christ, and of things heavenly and divine.” Every suggestion of this kind may ultimately be traced to Satan, who would keep out of heaven every son and daughter of Adam. In the season of youth, he would persuade to a belief that it is time enough to engage in religious pursuits.—“What,” says he, “wouldst thou devote the best of thy days to a life which is so dreadful and so gloomy as that of religion? Surely God intended that thou shouldst enjoy at least some of the pleasures of the world: When thou arrivest at a more advanced stage, then is the most proper season for thee to think of death

and eternity." In old age, his usual language is,—
 "Now thou hast sinned away the season of grace,
 "and there is no hope in thine end."

These are some of the principal causes which produce distress, fears, and doubts in those who are entering on the ways of religion, and concerning whom, hopes may be entertained, that their convictions either already have, or will end in the saving conversion of their souls.

B. But it must be remarked, that doubts and fears are not peculiar to the young Christian, but the minds of those are oppressed by them, who *have been longer ON THE ROAD*; among whom, *some* have indeed once WALKED IN MUCH LIGHT, but are now overwhelmed in midnight darkness; and *others* who have never attained to the SMALLEST DEGREE of assurance.

The principal causes of THEIR distress and fears, will now be mentioned.

a. They doubt and fear, BECAUSE THEY FEEL THE POWER OF THEIR CORRUPTIONS IN A HIGH DEGREE, AND FIND BUT LITTLE STRENGTH TO MAKE RESISTANCE AGAINST THEM. "O!" says one that is in such a case, "how is it possible that an heart like mine, in which are to be found so many corruptions, and where so many impurities obtain, can be an habitation for a holy God? My soul is constantly drawn off from God, and, before I am aware, it is carried away after the world and its sinful pursuits. At one time I am overtaken by passion, and am hurried into the grossest extravagancies; at another, a levity of mind diverts my attention from things sacred and serious, and though I have often resolved to live near to the Lord, and to pursue

“ a course of holiness, yet I am frequently made the
 “ victim of a heart deceitful above all things, and des-
 “ perately wicked, and yield to the first emotion of
 “ sin. Surely, if I were really a child of God, or
 “ possessed true grace, sin would be mortified, its
 “ power would be broken; for the apostle, address-
 “ ing himself to the believing Romans, declares,
 “ *Sin shall have no more dominion over you,*” Rom.
 vi. 14.

b. Some of God's dear children are alarmed, BE-
 CAUSE THEIR KNOWLEDGE OF DIVINE THINGS
 IS NOT MORE CLEAR, PRECISE, AND EXTEN-
 SIVE. “ It is presumption,” say they, “ for us ever
 “ to think to come into heaven, having such imper-
 “ fect ideas on matters of religion.” They are
 alarmed the more on this account, when they com-
 pare the little improvement which they have made
 in divine knowledge, with the vast acquisitions of
 many whose attainments are such, that whilst they
 are able to see with great perspicuity, the connection,
 harmony, and wisdom of the plan, as revealed by
 God for the recovery of sinners, also possess an abi-
 lity of speaking on those subjects, so as to benefit
 and highly contribute to the advantage of others.

c. It is no uncommon thing for Christians to be
 distressed, BECAUSE IN THEIR FIRST EXERCISES,
 WHEN THEY GAVE THEMSELVES AWAY TO GOD
 AND CHRIST, THEY EXPERIENCED BUT LITTLE
 JOY AND ENLARGEDNESS OF SOUL, IN COMPA-
 RISON WITH WHAT MANY OF THE REDEEMED
 OF THE LORD HAVE FELT. “ Is it possible,” say
 they, “ that we have in reality been brought out of
 “ a state of nature into a state of grace? that we have
 “ sincerely devoted ourselves to the Lord? when, at
 “ the time we suppose that change was wrought, and

“ this solemn surrender made, we were so unaffected;
 “ and destitute of the joys and consolations with
 “ which others have been elated, and peculiarly
 “ favoured? It cannot be, we have all along been
 “ indulging the fond hope, that we were in covenant
 “ with God; but alas! our hope has wanted a
 “ foundation.”

d. Doubts and fears arise in the minds of others; who (although they are not convinced but that they have once devoted themselves to God and his service with sincerity, yet BECAUSE THEY DO NOT MAKE THOSE ADVANCES IN THE DIVINE LIFE, WHICH SOME OF THEIR PIOUS ACQUAINTANCE DO,) conceive they must have deceived themselves, and judge accordingly, that the *root of the matter* is not in them. Their language is, “ There is that
 “ Christian friend, and others whom I might name,
 “ who, though they have been for a much shorter
 “ period engaged in the ways of religion than I have
 “ been, yet are far more bold and zealous in the
 “ cause of their Master. It is manifest to every attentive beholder, that their progress in religion is
 “ far greater than that which I have made. As for
 “ me, instead of advancing, I am going backward.
 “ Had I ever been a subject of true grace, it would
 “ never have been thus. I would have increased in
 “ grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.
 “ For the sweet singer of Israel declares, Psalm xcii.
 “ 13, *Those that be planted in the house of the Lord,*
 “ *shall flourish in the courts of our God.*”

e. Others doubt of their being in a state of grace, BECAUSE THE TIME ONCE WAS, WHEN THEY ENJOYED AN ASSURANCE OF THEIR INTEREST IN CHRIST, BUT NOW THEY WALK IN DARKNESS, AND SEE NO LIGHT; AND AT THE SAME

TIME ARE NOT CONSCIOUS THAT ANY ATROGIOUS SINS HAVE INTERVENED, WHICH MIGHT HAVE CAUSED A CHANGE SO REMARKABLE.— They conclude, that all the hopes they had once so fondly cherished, were without any grounds, and that all their former experiences were but imaginary ones. “For,” say they, “if they had been real, “God would not have thus withdrawn from us the “light of his countenance.”

f. Other Christians, when they deliberately survey the dealings of God with their souls, doubt of their being children of God, BECAUSE, HAVING BEEN CONVERTED IN THEIR YOUTH, THEY CANNOT, LIKE OTHERS, SPEAK OF THEIR EXERCISES WITH RESPECT TO REGENERATION, A CHANGE OF HEART, OR A PASSING FROM DEATH TO LIFE. In the days of their youth, they felt that they loved Jesus; that they hated sin; that they ardently desired to depart from it; and that it was their supreme delight to hear and meditate upon his word: But having advanced in life, and their corruptions having obtained greater strength, those sweet emotions have in a manner ceased, and the affections which were once so lively, are lulled to sleep. Then again the Eternal awakens them from their lethargy; their hatred of sin again returns; again they would flee from it as their most deadly foe; again their souls are inflamed with love to the Lord Jesus, and to all that bear his image; and again they go on their way in the experience of much calmness and composedness. Now whenever persons of this description hear other Christians converse on the subject of the new *birth*, and the marvellous change which it produced in them, they begin to be suspicious, and to imagine that all their exercises were

nothing more than childish affections, or the effects of a pious education. “For,” say they, “we have never undergone such a change.”

g. Many are brought to doubt of their being children of God, by OBSERVING ON THE ONE HAND, THE PROSPERITY OF THE WICKED, AND ON THE OTHER, THAT WHILST THE UNGODLY HAVE NO BANDS IN THEIR DEATH, THEY HAVE TO GROAN UNDER MOST OPPRESSIVE BURDENS AND TRYING AFFLICTIONS. They are reduced to penury; they meet with various calamities; sickness and pains are their constant companions; they are grieved by the distresses which friends near and dear to them experience.—Now when they see the enemies of true religion wafted gently on the tide of prosperity, and themselves, who have professed to be on the Lord’s side, perpetually buffeting the storms of adversity, they immediately draw a conclusion most erroneous, and say with Gideon, Judges vi. 13, “*If the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us? If God were our Father, would this poverty have overtaken us? would we have had to pass through such scenes of distress? Can these things correspond with a father’s love and faithfulness? Would he not rather as a father have provided for us? It cannot but be, that our way is hid from the Lord, and our judgment is passed over from our God.*” Such were also the sentiments of Asaph, before he went into the sanctuary of the Lord: *Behold, says he, these are the ungodly that prosper in the world; they increase in riches. Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency: For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning,* Psalm lxxiii. And it is not a matter which should astonish us, that even

such temporal afflictions should excite fear and doubt in the mind. It is not so easy as some may suppose, to be so acquiescent in the adverse dispensations of Providence, as to unite with Job, and express ourselves in the language of resignation to the Divine will, saying, *The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.*

h. There are also some of God's people who question their being in a gracious state, BECAUSE THEY HAVE TO STRUGGLE AGAINST SO MANY SINFUL AND BLASPHEMOUS THOUGHTS OF GOD. Are they engaged in public worship or in secret prayer? their thoughts are often wandering to and fro. On a sudden, suggestions are made to their minds of a most dreadful nature, at which they not only must recoil, but which fills them with terror; and which they dare not mention to their nearest friends. "Can such thoughts," say they, "arise in the hearts of those who are converted to God, and who possess that divine principle *which purifies the* HEART. It cannot be; and therefore we must conclude, that God is not our Father, that Jesus is no Saviour of ours, and that his Spirit dwells not in us."

i. Another will express himself thus: "I dare not, on any principle whatever, hope, that a good work is begun in me; for the LIFE OF GRACE IS A HIDDEN LIFE, which is exercised when the Christian is alone with his God. But this is not my case; for, in the presence of my fellow men indeed I appear in the character of a child of God. When I am in company with the pious, I can with fluency and fervour converse on the great and leading doctrines of grace—I can join with them in prayer.—My external deportment is vast-

ly different from that of the men of the world—
 “ Their desires and dispositions comport not with
 “ mine: and when waiting upon God in his ordi-
 “ nances, often has my heart been awakened. But,
 “ ah! I never RETIRE ALONE but both MY ZEAL;
 “ my ANIMATION, and my attention CEASE and
 “ DISAPPEAR; I cannot, with any fixedness of
 “ heart, meditate on God or on divine truths; my
 “ prayers languish on my tongue; all is dulness;
 “ a lifelessness obtains.—And are not these the true
 “ characteristics of hypocrites, who like myself have
 “ *the form*, but are destitute of the *power* of godli-
 “ ness?—I fear that at best I can be esteemed one
 “ who may show the way of life unto others, but
 “ walk not therein myself.”

k. Lastly, (for who can mention all the particular
 sources from whence the streams of doubts and fears
 issue?) The language of another is, “ I am fearful
 “ that I have NO GOOD OBJECT in view in all I
 “ perform; that I seek not the glory of God, but
 “ mine own interest. Do I enter into the company
 “ of true believers? it is more that I may edify than
 “ that I may be edified. If I do any action which
 “ is really good, pride swells my heart. Now, cer-
 “ tainly, these cannot comport with the exercises of
 “ those who are in a state of grace. I therefore must
 “ conclude, that I, who am by nature *dead in tres-*
 “ *passes and sins*, have never been *quickened* by the
 “ almighty and irresistible energies of the Holy
 “ Ghost.”

See thus, the difficulties which Christians meet,
 and which operate as so many causes that they travel
 the celestial road doubting and fearing as they pro-
 gress therein.

We must now, in the THIRD place, endeavour to

apply the healing balm to each of these wounds, and POINT OUT THE MEANS, by which those followers of Jesus may proceed heaven-ward, in the experience of comfort, joy, and peace.—Each particular case, in the order they have been stated, will be separately considered, and that advice suggested which may appear suitable.

The doubts and fears of YOUNG Christians

1. Arise from an apprehension that their convictions are not genuine, because THEY WERE NEVER ACCOMPANIED WITH THAT GREAT DISTRESS OF MIND WHICH THEY HAVE SEEN OTHERS TO EXPERIENCE. But let,

a. Such learn to attend with care TO THE WAYS OF GOD IN DISPENSING GRACE. All his children are not led in one and the same way. Some must drink of the bitter waters of MARAH, whilst others may recline beneath the *palm-trees*, and regale on the streams which issue from the *wells of Elim*. Yes, it sometimes happens that those who have been the boldest in iniquity, have been brought to the enjoyment of fellowship with God, in a way the most easy and endearing, without having more convictions and views of the awful nature of sin than were absolutely necessary to induce them to turn their eyes to Jesus, and to come unto him, that they might receive freely at his hands a right to life and salvation, which he alone possesses an all-sufficiency to impart.—Whilst others, who have led sober and moral lives, have been AWFULLY brought over to Christ; they have experienced in their consciences, terrors equalled only by the torments of hell; their anguish at the contemplation of their sin and guilt the human tongue cannot describe; the dread horrors of their minds burst into view, being depicted

upon their countenances. By all this, the Lord designed to teach them, that to lean upon their own righteousness was as abominable in his sight as to openly live in sin. To the end, therefore, that you may have peace, yea joy in believing, seek to become acquainted with the various ways according to which *Jehovah* leads his people to their mansions in glory.

b. Let not the DEGREE OF CONVICTIONS which other Christians have had, be a *rule* by which you judge of the GENUINENESS of your own. Say not, “The convictions with which others have been exercised have been so very severe as well nigh to bring them to despair, and that therefore, unless our distresses arrive to the same height, it is certain God’s Spirit hath not *convinced us of sin*.” You have no right thus to judge. There is but one *rule* according to which in all things we are to proceed in judging in this and in all other cases; and that rule is the word of God. Now the word of God no where teaches us how great or how severe convictions must be when genuine; but when persons are under concern, it directs them to Christ—By faith in Jesus alone we can be saved. Be not then troubled with respect to the *degree* of your convictions; rather be concerned as to the *truth* of them. Methinks we hear you say, “Ah! *the truth* of them! That is the very thing which produces our present distress. How shall we judge as to their truth?” Permit us to ask you, Have not your convictions brought you to lie at the feet of Jesus as a vile and as a hell-deserving sinner? Have you not seen so much evil in sin as to convince you, that without an interest in Christ you must perish for ever? Yea, did not a sight of sin, in all its hideous forms and dreadful

consequences, excite you to fly unto him for the life of your souls?—Are you compelled to reply, “ Yes, “ I must confess that Jesus is dear to my heart, and “ in every respect precious?”—We can then on the warrant of God’s own word assure you, that your convictions have been sufficiently great; for all the end which God proposes to accomplish by them is to drive the sinner, miserable and wretched as he is, to Christ. If they effect not this, to whatever degree they may arise, so far will they be from bringing you to heaven, that they will bring you, as they did Judas, to awful despair; for, as has been remarked, Jesus, and faith in his name, constitute the only ground on which a sinner can hope to be saved. And has it pleased God to bring you over to Christ in a mild and easy way? duty demands that you give him the praise for having drawn you with the cords of love, without feeling that undescrivable anguish which has embittered the lives of other Christians for months, yea, for years.

c. We counsel you, NEVER TO BE SO UNWISE AS EVEN TO WISH TO HAVE A VIEW OF SIN IN ALL ITS HIDEOUS FORMS; for no man living would be able to endure the awful picture which it would present. A discovery of this kind would almost instantaneously lead the soul to despair. Many indeed have earnestly desired it; but when their request was granted in some measure, they became as pressing in their petitions that the terrific exhibition might cease; for that a sight so dreadful, if continued, would inevitably lead to the extremes of despondency. To those young Christians, who appear so anxious to obtain a view of an object so detestable and insupportable, we must say, as the Lord

Jefus did once to his difciples, *Ye know not what ye afk*, Matt. xx. 22.

2. Or do your doubts and fears arife, BECAUSE YOU HAVE NO CERTAIN KNOWLEDGE OF THE TIME AND PLACE WHEN AND WHERE YOUR HEARTS WERE CHANGED, by reason of having often been awakened, and in virtue of having received a religious education? To fuch of you we would remark,

a. That duty demands, that you thank God, that through your whole lives you have had your confciences awakened. It is a certain evidence that his eye has been upon you for good, and that in this way he defigned to preferve you from many fins into which it is likely you would otherwife have fallen.

b. Was your education fober and moral? have you been kept from being deluded by the fnares of the world, or charmed by its alluring pleasures?— This will greatly contribute to your advantage: For it will not be difficult for you to withdraw your hearts from it, whilft others *halt between two opinions*.

c. Think not that it is any thing effential, to be able to designate the exact time of your change. A knowledge of the time of your being made fpiritually alive belongs no more to the effence of regeneration than it appertains to the effence of man that he know precifely the time of his birth. It is enough that we know that we are men.

d. Look back to fome former period of your lives, and then let each one afk himfelf, “ Am I not now a “ different perfon from what I then was? Do I not “ fee divine truths through another medium, and “ with other eyes. Are not my defires more heavenly than once they were? Have I not different

“ objects of pursuit ? Are not mine exercises of another nature ? Can I find rest barely in the external profession of religion, as was once the case ? Does it not rejoice my soul, when I find that my convictions do not wear away, but serve to excite me to haste, to run, to fly to Jesus ? ” Canst thou not answer each or the most of these questions in the affirmative ? Well then, consider not your state to be hopeless, merely because you know not the *time* when God commenced his work of grace upon your hearts ; but rather let your constant language be that of the man that was born blind :—*One thing I know, that once I was blind, but now I see*, John ix. 25.

3. Are ye distressed ? Do fears arise BECAUSE GOD hath not as it were IN A MOMENT CHANGED YOUR HEARTS ;—because he is CARRYING ON HIS WORK GRADUALLY ;—because you have been OFTEN AWAKENED, and HAVE SUPPRESSED in a manner those awakenings ? To such fearful souls we would just suggest,

a. That it is not impossible that in your first convictions, the principle of true grace may have existed ; but because it did not please God to make such a display of his power as he sometimes does, those first small sparks which were enkindled, seemed afterwards to be entirely extinguished.—By this mode of dealing, God may have designed to wean your hearts by little and little from the world, and to prepare them for a complete surrender to himself, and to his service. Your convictions may indeed have subsided, but have they ever altogether disappeared, so as to leave behind no awakenings of conscience ?—Does there not still remain, a fear of offending your God ?

b. That it is a duty, to examine with care, whether your FORMER convictions did not proceed more

from having contemplated God as vindictive in his justice, and from a dread of punishment, the necessary consequence of sin, than from love and esteem for God; and whether those with which you are now exercised do not cause you to see more of the evil of sin, as that which makes you unlike to God; and to behold charms in the service of the Lord, which before you never witnessed?

c. Have not your convictions already produced a considerable change in your hearts and lives? Did you not once pant after the world, and are you not longing now for God as your portion, and for Christ as your Redeemer? The time was, when you could not bear the thought of being debarred from the pleasures and company of the world; but are you not now inclined to forsake both,—to delight yourselves in the Lord, and associate with those who fear him? Once, to be alone was your burden; but now do you not find your greatest satisfaction when retired from the busy scenes of life, and engaged in the secret duties of religion? Have you experienced any of these things? Then, on the best of grounds you may hope, that the ETERNAL having thus laid his hand upon you in mercy, hath effected a change truly saving.

d. Are you afraid, that if you had the same opportunities to sin which you have had, you would embrace them? Such fear is good. It is an evidence that you have felt your inability. It will excite you to cleave to the Lord more and more for preserving and sanctifying grace.

e. And here, *in general*, it must be urged upon ALL, that they beware of opposing the first convictions which they may discover to be wrought in others, lest they render those distressed and disconsolate, who are dear to God, and precious in his

fight. And thou, CONVINCED SINNER, be particularly on thy guard against suppressing thy convictions. Dost thou perceive in thy heart any pious emotions? be careful to cherish them. Satan will seek to bring thee into a snare, by tempting thee to shake them off. But listen not to his delusions. Seek by every mean of grace to keep them alive, until they produce a total and unreserved surrender of thy heart to God.

4. DOST THOU FEAR THAT THOU HAST COMMITTED THE SIN AGAINST THE HOLY GHOST, AND THEREFORE GIVE UP ALL HOPES OF BEING SAVED?

a. Believe that this is only a suggestion of the devil, an artifice devised in the regions of the damned, with a view of rendering thy life wretched, and of depriving thee of all the joys of religion.

b. Thou sayest, "I have committed that awful sin, which shall never be forgiven;—my hopes are for ever cut off—I am excluded from pardon, and debarred from expecting remission, even through the merits of Jesus."—In our humble opinion, thou art wholly ignorant of the nature of the sin against the Holy Ghost: For if thou hadst the least knowledge of it, thou must have been perfectly satisfied that thou couldst not possibly have been guilty of it. For the sin against the Holy Ghost cannot be committed but by *those whose understandings have been illuminated, and whose attainments in the knowledge of divine truths have been peculiarly great: and who without cause, for the sake of some temporal advantage, and from a principle of hatred and opposition to God, have renounced the truths of the gospel, without having ever the least sorrow, distress, or contrition of heart on that account; For if any person, guilty of*

this sin, could possibly feel that genuine sorrow and distress which would drive him to God and to Christ, there would be pardon for such a sinner, as well as for sinners of any other description.—But—remember it—those who have committed the sin against the Holy Ghost *are always given over to hardness of heart*. They never feel the least compunction for having sinned; and never do those unhappy creatures experience the smallest regard for God, or the honour of his name. Like infernal spirits in the gloomy prisons of the damned, they live but to oppose and to blaspheme.—Now, afflicted child of God, who conceivest that thou hast committed this awful sin,—consider the description we have given of it, and then ask thyself—“Have I committed it? “Surely not,” if thou art candid, must be thy reply; “for I now see that, if I were guilty, my heart never would have felt such distress on account of it; “I would have given myself no concern; I would “not have been in any wise solicitous for pardon; I “would never have gone to God, *nor panted after him, as the hart after the water brooks*.”—Well then, lay aside all thy fears and all thy doubts, which have arisen from the awful temptation, that the sin against the Holy Ghost *lieth at thy door*.

5. Or, dost thou, CHRISTIAN, think THAT THOU ART NOT AN OBJECT OF ELECTING LOVE, AND THEREFORE WILT BE EXCLUDED THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN?

Upon what ground canst thou draw the conclusion, that thou art not elected? Hast thou ever penetrated the purposes of the Eternal? Are not these the *secret things which belong to God*? As long as a person lives, he can have no perfect evidence of his being REPROBATED, excepting in the case of his

having committed the sin against the Holy Ghost; and even in respect to one who may appear to us to have been guilty of that dreadful crime, it is difficult absolutely to determine; for from experience we are taught, that men may go the greatest lengths in sinning, and still become the subjects of true conversion. It is not for us to prescribe limits to the riches of divine grace. On the contrary, the word of God presents us with marks in abundance, by which a person may ascertain, not only that he is not a vessel of wrath, but a vessel of mercy—not a reprobate, but an object of electing love. And amongst the great variety of marks, this is *one*,—That we choose God for our portion, desire to *walk in the light of his countenance*, and *follow after holiness*. Ask thyself then, whether God is the supreme object of thy delight; whether thou desirest that he would direct thee in all thy ways; and whether thou art pursuing the paths which he hath set thee? And if thou find that thou canst honestly reply in the affirmative, give thyself no anxious concern, but *leave secret things with God*.

6. Is thy mind disquieted, BECAUSE THOU FEAREST, THAT NOW IT IS FOR EVER TOO LATE FOR THEE TO OBTAIN SALVATION; THAT THY DAY OF GRACE IS PAST?—This is no other than a temptation of Satan. It can never be too late for thee to seek for grace at the hand of God. Scripture gives *ONE* instance of this, the thief on the cross, to the end that none might despair, and yet but *one*, that none might presume. We read, Matt. xx. 5, 6, of some that were called, as well at the *eleventh* as at the *ninth hour*. And hast thou long put off serious thoughts with respect to religion? Hast thou long delayed to return to God? It is

high time now, that thou *awake*, that thou *attend to the things that belong to thine everlasting peace*. God is still stretching out his hand all the day long, and most pressing invites thee to his communion.

Having thus attempted to remove the difficulties with which those are oppressed who are commencing a religious life, and to animate them to make farther progress, let us now address a word to those who HAVE BEEN LONGER ON THE WAY, but who at the same time have their fears, that their state is not a gracious one.

1. Are thy fears and distresses caused by a sense of thy remaining corruptions, which break out, on every temptation?

a. Consider that grace does not entirely exclude the corruptions with which sin hath contaminated our natures. God hath permitted them to remain, that his people might not be exalted above measure, that Jesus and his blood might constantly be precious to them,—that they might be excited to apply daily unto him as to *the fountain* which is opened for sin and uncleanness,—and that they might be awakened to ardent desires to obtain perfection. The apostle Paul, that greatest of saints, complained in the most affecting terms, of the plagues of his heart, and of the body of sin, Rom. vi.

b. This must also produce a sense of shame, and humble thee in the dust, that thou hast not with more earnestness opposed sin, especially the *sins that more easily beset thee*, thy bosom sins, and that thou dost not watch with greater circumspection over thy heart, by which thou wouldst not be in danger, so readily, of listening to the suggestions which it offers.

c. But that thou mayest still be encouraged, examine with care how thy heart is affected with respect

to sin.—Art thou often surprised into it, against thy will? and when thou fallest into any transgression, does not thy heart smite thee? Art thou not filled with distress? Canst thou not appeal unto God, that thou hast no greater desire than to become more holy, and to have sin more and more mortified? Dost thou not often go, with thy heart sinful and polluted as it is, to the Lord Jesus, not barely that thou mayest obtain remission through his blood, but that thou mayest also, by his holy Spirit, receive strength to oppose sin? Art thou not compelled to say, “O my God! I cannot any longer support a load so intolerable. *My sins are gone over my head, as an heavy burden. They are too heavy for me.*”

And are not these exercises a full evidence that *sin hath no more dominion* over thee, and that the principle of grace is in thy heart?

2. Art thou distressed because of thine ignorance, because thy knowledge of divine truths is circumscribed within such narrow bounds that thou canst not, like others, converse upon them with perspicuity?

a. A conviction of this may produce a sense of shame, but it ought not to lead thee to despond. It should not operate as a cause of anxious distress, but as an excitement to thee to seek to increase in knowledge.

b. For thine encouragement we cannot but remark, that perhaps IN THY YOUTH, that precious season for improvement, thou hadst but little opportunity of making much proficiency in knowledge; and at the time, when GOD MANIFESTED himself to thy soul, such was thy situation in life, that thou wert unable to make much progress in the

science of things heavenly and divine. And with all this thy God is acquainted.

c. A person may attain to salvation with a comparatively small degree of knowledge. The measure God hath not revealed. If thou hast an experimental knowledge of the essential and leading doctrines of the gospel, it is sufficient, and thou wilt not deny but that with these thou art acquainted.

d. It is very possible that thou enjoyest more of the sweetness, and feelest more of the power of divine truths, than others, whose knowledge is very extensive and enlarged. And it is certain, that if, like some thou canst not learnedly reason, thou canst speak feelingly and experimentally on divine subjects, which is certainly a far greater attainment.

e. And if, either through a defect in thy natural powers, or want of an opportunity of improvement in divine knowledge, thou canst not be as useful to others as thou wouldst, remember there is a *diversity of gifts*. Do only what thou canst for God, the offer of thy MITE will be acceptable to him.

f. Comfort thyself with this pleasing reflection, that the change which thou wilt experience when thou shalt enter into that glorious habitation which thy Jesus hath gone to prepare for thee, will be so great, that thy knowledge which is now so imperfect shall bear the stamp of perfection. *Thou shalt know even as thou art known.*

3. Art thou at times alarmed, because, when thou gavest thy soul to God, thou didst not experience that joy, that freedom which others have felt? Be it even so—What then?—We confess it to be very pleasing, and a source of exquisite delight, to be thus exercised in the act of devoting ourselves to God; but still, the want of this experience is not an evi-

dence that thou hast never done it—that thou art yet in a graceless state. A trembling hand, and an eye streaming with tears, are peculiarly agreeable to God. Many a soul hath come to him, as it is said the children of Israel shall come in the latter days, *fearing the Lord and his goodness*. Although Esther approached the king with a fearful heart, and with sentiments like these—*If I perish, I perish*, yet the sceptre was reached out to her, and she *found favour in the eyes of the king*. To draw near to God in such a frame of soul, argues often a stronger faith than to come to him in the exercise of great joy. And afterwards God frequently shows, that such an approach was pleasing to him; as perhaps thou thyself mayest have experienced.

4. Art thou distressed, because thy growth in grace is small, compared even with those who have been a much shorter time on the road than thou hast been?

a. This circumstance may, yea, ought to make thee more humble; nor is it matter of astonishment to us that thou art brought to a stand, and made to reason thus with thyself: “Am I truly in the way to heaven? If I were, whence is it that I do not advance more in the divine life? Surely there is for me as well as for another, a fulness in Jesus, to enable me to bring forth much fruit.” Make then careful search whether the cause of not progressing is not with thyself, and let shame cover thy face on that account, in the presence of thy God.

b. But it is sometimes the effect of Jehovah’s sovereign determination, that one believer grows more in grace than another. It is in grace as it is in nature: One man more rapidly attains to his full growth than another. It does not unfrequently happen, that those who are more advanced in life are

surpassed by those who are in their prime, both in activity of body and in strength of mind. It is also the case in the divine life. Some of God's dear children, for wise and holy reasons, are suffered to travel the celestial road, languishing as they proceed, surrounded by thick darkness, and encompassed with many difficulties; whilst others run their race with joy, and thus with far greater speed advance and leave their elder brethren at a distance in the rear.

c. It is possible that thou art growing in grace more than thou dost imagine, although it be not so visible and apparent in thyself as it is in others. The fruits thou bringest forth, couldst thou but realize them, are as much tokens of a gracious state, as those which other Christians produce. What! is not that meek and lowly heart, that cleaving with all thy soul to the Lord, that high estimation of Jesus, those effusions of love, that looking off from self, and that living upon free grace,—are not these fruits, secret fruits of the Spirit's divine and efficacious operations on thy soul? To be thus exercised, is it not to increase in grace? But thy God is pleased to conceal this from thee, to keep thee humble, and to make thee feel more of thy dependance on him who dispenses all his blessings according to his sovereign will.

d. Other Christians who now appear to thee advancing with such a quickened pace, may possibly live to see the time when things shall not go on so prosperously. When first thou didst experience the power of religion on thy heart, thy progress was greater than it is at present. Whilst that first fire burned,—whilst that first zeal and engagedness continued, the soul could as it were break through every difficulty, and overcome every obstacle in its

way. But no sooner does that flame decrease, than the soul appears stationary, and unable to progress in the ways of religion. But this is not mentioned with a view to dishearten and discourage babes in Christ, but to warn them, on the one hand to be watchful over themselves, to beware of backsliding, and to continue advancing in their heavenly course; and on the other hand, to set them on their guard against judging lightly of others. *Let him that standeth, take heed lest he fall. Be not high-minded, but fear.*

5. Or dost thou say,—Once I was assured of my being in the faith; but now I walk in darkness, and on this account I fear that my former experiences were imaginary; for had they been genuine, God would now have manifested himself to my soul?—This difficulty may proceed from ignorance; for nothing is more common than for God to deal differently with his people at different periods. Read the whole word of God, thou wilt see that at one time his people walk in darkness, at another in the light of God's countenance. It is the good pleasure of our heavenly Father, that his children should live by faith, not by sense. Does it sometimes happen that believers have their hearts enlarged, obtain views of their interest in Christ, and have the glories of heaven set before them? It is indeed a source of encouragement, but it is not a foundation on which they should rest. And has the Lord at some past period of thy life granted unto thee such bright and delightful prospects? And wert thou then convinced that the *work was done in truth*? It is still a real work;—for *God is faithful*. But perhaps thou hast not been sufficiently careful to preserve the light which then beamed upon thy soul, and thy walk

and conversation perhaps have not been marked by that tenderness which the word prescribes; and that for these things the Lord hath been pleased to conceal from thee his countenance. Humble thyself then before Jehovah, but let not thy confidence be shaken. Although thou SEEST not, yet thou must BELIEVE.

6. Art thou, Christian, distressed, and dost thou doubt of thy state—because like others thou canst not point to the time when any remarkable essential change took place in thee, but from thy earliest youth hast had religious impressions?—We observe,

a. That God's word speaks of numbers, as Obadiah, Jeremiah, and Timothy, who were converted in the spring season of their lives. Many instances of this are found, besides what the Scriptures relate. It is therefore no uncommon circumstance.

b. Thou must not examine thyself by those marks which respect the first principles of grace; but by those which the children of God find in themselves as long as they are travelling the celestial road.—Come then, ask not, “Was there a time when I “passed from death unto life, and received like *Ca-* “*leb* another spirit?” but seriously enquire, What dost thou at present experience? Dost thou not know that thou art altogether unholy and unclean? Is there any good thing in thee, on which thou wouldst dare to rest, for acceptance with God? On the contrary, dost thou not discover that the longer thou livest the more sinful thou findest thyself to be?—a certain evidence this, that thou hast been divinely illuminated, at least so far as to see that thy heart is deceitful and desperately wicked. Again, dost thou not feel that thy soul is exercised by faith and love to the Lord Jesus? Hast thou no esteem

for glorious Christ? Is he not precious to thee, yea most precious? Dost thou not often give him thy heart? And to evidence that thou art in earnest, hast thou not a sincere desire to live before him, and to devote all thy time and all thy powers to his service?

Art thou compelled to confess that these are thine exercises? Thou hast then, not the least reason to doubt as to thy state, or for a moment to be distressed concerning it. Praise thy God, and be grateful to him, for having inclined thee even from thy youth to pursue the things of religion.

7. Are others made to doubt of their state, from the circumstance—that the wicked prosper in the world, and that they have to pass through life buffeting the storms of adversity. It was this which distressed the pious mind of Asaph, Psal. lxxiii. and there is as little ground for thee to be distressed on account of those dispensations of Divine Providence as there was for him: For,

a. There are no truths more certain than these,—*that many are the afflictions of the righteous, and that whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth.* Yes, those whom he most affectionately regards, are often called to the severest trials. By this the Eternal designs to wean them from the world, and to make their graces shine with brighter lustre. And do infidels, and men whose principles are most loose and abandoned, bask beneath a prosperous sun? Is it not often in wrath? At best their portion lies below—They know no other happiness. Of this Asaph was sensible, when he went into the sanctuary of God. Believer—think it then no strange thing, that thy Father visiteth thee with the rod, and giveth thee chastising strokes.

b. Dost thou not often, in the very midst of thine

afflictions, experience that the Eternal manifests his divine presence, and that his power is put forth for thy deliverance, and that at a time when all succour has failed, and thou canst see no way of escape.— Learn from this, that thy God *careth for thee*; that his paternal eye is upon thee, and that he will *never leave nor forsake thee*. Didst thou but duly consider these things, so far from leading thee to an unfavourable conclusion with respect to thy state, thou wouldst become more established and confirmed in the belief, that thou art his child, and that he is thy covenant God.

c. Examine, whether the afflictions which have been sent have not been sanctified, and produced the peaceful fruits of righteousness. Do they not make thy heart less attached to this world, and cause thine affections to be placed more on heavenly objects? Art thou not compelled, from what thou hast experienced in seasons of distress, to withdraw thy confidence from the creature as incapable of being a sufficient portion to thy soul, and to place thy trust alone in the LORD, as one who is able to satisfy, to comfort the immortal spirit. All these are conclusive evidence, that thine afflictions are *working together for thy present and eternal good*.

8. Is it the language of thy heart, Christian, “ I have reason to doubt of my interest in the merits of the Redeemer; for I dare not communicate to any person whatever, what horrid, what blasphemous thoughts obtrude themselves, especially when I am engaged in the most holy duties of religion.” With a view to thy comfort, we would just remark,

a. That this is nothing uncommon with the people of God. Many eminent Christians have complained on this point equally with thyself. Think

it not then a new case. If, when assailed by the grand adversary of thy soul, blasphemous thoughts are suggested,

b. Learn to distinguish between thoughts which immediately proceed from the heart, and those fiery darts which Satan shoots into it. It is indeed true, that our hearts are wicked and depraved enough to produce the most sinful thoughts, and hence it is difficult to make the proposed distinction. However, it may be made.—Do those sinful thoughts overtake thee by surprise, when thy mind is employed on other subjects? When they arise, do they excite abhorrence? Do they dispose thee to wrestle and pray against them? Then, believe it—they are temptations from hell, and thou shouldst view them more as SUFFERINGS and as SEVERE TRIALS, than as SIN. But are the thoughts of which thou art complaining, idle, vain, worldly, insomuch that thou art rendered by means of them unfit for holy duties, it is certainly an evidence of the existence of indwelling corruptions, on account of which it becometh thee indeed to be humbled, but not to judge unfavourably with respect to thy state—For the very act of seeing that in thy heart such strong corruptions obtain, and of groaning beneath a pressure so great, are marks and strong evidences of grace.

9. Art thou afraid, that thou art not sincere in the professions of religion which thou hast made, because when thou art engaged in secret duties thou art dull and lifeless, but when in company full of animation.

We grant, that this may produce great distress, and raise doubts in the mind—We grant that there are many hypocrites, who can speak with an uncommon degree of accuracy and apparent ardour on the subjects of religion, but who at the same time never

have felt the power of gospel truths upon their hearts.—To such we do not address ourselves; for such are strangers to that distress of which we are now speaking.—To THEE we speak, who complaineſt that thy frames are not lively, and doſt conclude conſequentially, that thy ſtate is far from being a gracious one: for thy comfort, and encouragement we obſerve,

a. That, to unfit the ſoul for ſecret duties, is the great point which Satan ſeeks to gain: for he is aware that to be ſuitably exerciſed at thoſe ſeaſons, tends much to promote the Chriſtian's joy and comfort.

b. I aſk thee further, canſt thou feel any ſatisfaction, if having been in ſecret with thy God, thy frames have been ſpiritleſs, and languid?—Is not this a matter of lamentation to thee before the Lord? And art thou at any time quickened, when retired to meet with thy God? is it not the life of thy ſoul; is not the experience of ſuch heavenly frames more precious to thee, than all which this world affords? Say, Chriſtian, are not theſe things evidences of thy ſincerity and uprightness?

10. Once more, doſt thou doubt of thy being in a gracious ſtate, becauſe in the good actions which thou mayeſt have performed, thou haſt not had the glory of God in view, but thine own? We answer, It is a fact: ſelfiſh motives too often are the ſprings of action, and not ſeldom are found mixed with our beſt performances: this, Chriſtians who have been far advanced in the divine life, have found to their ſorrow. The following example will elucidate precisely our meaning. A miniſter of the goſpel, having prepared to preach, and to publiſh to ſinners the glad tidings of ſalvation, leaves his ſtudy, having the PUREST and MOST PIOUS intention of being inſtrumental towards the extension of the Redeemer's

kingdom, in the persuasion of sinners to enter into the service of God. With such objects in view, he enters the Temple of the Most High; he engages in speaking on themes the most interesting, heavenly, and divine. Now, it pleases the Lord to elevate his heart, to animate his soul with zeal, and he delivers truth as with an angel's tongue; he sees every auditor serious and affected. Now, Satan comes, enkindles in his heart some sparks of pride: his language now is "a discourse, delivered with such animation, "with so much seriousness, and with such apparent "power, will not fail to endear me to the pious, "and cause my fame as a Preacher to extend far and "wide."—But does God give him grace to watch over his heart; does he perceive such sentiments rushing in upon his mind, he endeavours to resist them, and will not harbour them even for a moment, being fully persuaded that the glory of all belongs to God, and that from him proceeds any ability he may possess, to engage in the work of the Lord.

Thus we see that a person's views in acting may be pure, and at the same time sinful motives may obtrude themselves, if God himself give us not a heart to guard against them. But it is no ground on which thou oughtest to consider thy state hopeless, even if thou shouldst not find the motives of action such as thou wouldst wish. Dost thou ask then, "What must "I do? for it is this which keeps me back from "doing many things which I would otherwise perform."—We answer,

a. Leave not, on this account, any duty undone, which thou art convinced ought to be performed; for wert thou to delay the performance of duty until thou wert perfectly free from sin, thou wouldst never perform a single good action. It hath pleased God

to permit all thy works to be contaminated with sin, to the end that thou mightest be humbled in his presence, and constantly flee to the blood of Christ for pardon.

b. When thou findest that PRIDE begins to rise, consider thy depravity, the wickedness, and deceitfulness of thy heart. This will greatly tend to keep thee little in thine own eyes.

c. Humble thyself, with Hezekiah, before the Lord, and bewail the pride of thine heart, than which nothing is more unbecoming worms of the dust.

d. In the mean time, comfort thyself with this consideration, that the complaints which thou makest concerning thy pride, prove that thou art sincere in thy profession; for, to see the corruptions which lie lurking within, requires spiritual light; and to mourn over them, and to oppose them, is a sure sign that their dominion is broken.

Thus, in as concise a manner as possible, have we attempted to remove the fears and doubts which arise in the minds of true Christians.

We now proceed to the FOURTH and LAST THING proposed, which was to administer counsel and direction to distressed and doubting souls, as to the manner in which they ought to conduct themselves, so as to approach, with profit and advantage, the holy supper of our Lord.

1. SEEK TO HAVE THY HEART BROUGHT TO A CALM AND COMPOSED FRAME, in order that thou mayest be able rightly to apprehend

a. THE TRUE NATURE OF CONVICTIONS.

Thou thinkest perhaps that no convictions can be genuine, but those which are accompanied with much distress, and the most alarming fears, and which exhibit sin in all its horrid and aggravated forms;

But this is an improper and erroneous idea : always believe it to be a truth, as has already been hinted, that convictions are only designed to make the sinner confide no more in his own righteousness, and to excite him, as a creature most vile and miserable, to fly to Christ, and to seek refuge beneath the shadow of his wings.

Never then, Christian, wish to have a greater, or more awful view of sin, than will be instrumental in effecting this. O! if God were to set sin before thine eyes in its true colours, the sight would overcome thee: it is insupportable by mortals.

b. Learn rightly to apprehend *the nature of faith*. This will prove of peculiar advantage to thee, in approaching the holy table of the Lord.

Faith appears to thee a grace which it is more arduous to exercise, than in fact it is. Thou canst not conceive that to hunger and thirst after righteousness, to run, to fly to Jesus, to receive him, to venture thy soul upon him, are acts by which persons become really united to Christ, and are made partakers of salvation. For in thy conception, these are things which thou art enabled easily to perform; these are exercises in which thou art every day engaged.

But we solicit thee to examine the whole word of God, and see for thyself whether it be not fact, that the everlasting salvation of a sinner is connected with an hungering and thirsting after Christ, with a cordial reception of him in all his offices, and with looking solely, and steadfastly unto Jesus.

Perhaps thou thinkest that faith must be a work which is meritorious, and equivalent to salvation.—To embrace a sentiment of this kind, would be to hold that for truth, which lies directly out of the line of truth. Faith is no where represented as a

work; though as an instrument it be the hand that receives Christ for salvation, yet it is a benefit of the covenant of *grace*. Acknowledge then, Christian, that thy salvation flows altogether from the rich, free and sovereign grace of God. If thou couldst only be brought so far as to believe that sincere, ardent, and constant desires after Christ; that the laying of ourselves at his feet, as creatures most unworthy to obtain salvation at his hands, was true and genuine faith, then thou wouldst readily grant that thou wast in reality a believer, seeing these are more or less thine exercises, by day and by night, at home and abroad, in secret and in public; and we assure thee, that there are many now in glory, who never knew in their experience any other kind of faith.

c. Seek also rightly to *understand the nature of assurance*, and especially that a distinction must be observed always between that which is ORDINARY, and that which is EXTRAORDINARY. Perhaps thou hast thought that then persons only are assured of their faith, when the Eternal embraces them in the arms of his love, caresses them, and addresses their hearts, in language the most tender and expressive of his complacency in them. But this is extraordinary, or immediate assurance.

But ordinary assurance is something quite different from that just described. It may be obtained by the Christian, on examining whether the marks of grace, laid down in the word of God, have been found in him. If, for instance, he finds that he is *poor in spirit*, distressed on account of sin; that he hungers and thirsts after the Lord Jesus, and earnestly desires to be holy in heart and life, he may conclude that his salvation is sure. The word of God pronounces

BLESSED, persons who are exactly of such a description.

2. We advise thee, as thou art again preparing to approach the holy supper of the Lord, to retire in secret, and reflecting on the past periods of thy life, to see whether thou canst not recollect the time when thy heart was inflamed with love to God, and ardently longed after Jesus; when petition upon petition was by thee presented to the throne, and when thou wert able to devote thyself to him, as thy mighty redeemer. Dost thou reply in the affirmative, and acknowledge that these have been thine exercises; but at the same time dost thou add, "These were but momentary exercises; they lasted but for a short season. I am now walking in darkness, I am at a loss what judgment to form with respect to myself; I am fearful that, after all, I have experienced nothing more than the common gifts of the spirit, of which the apostle speaks so particularly," Heb. 6.

3. We therefore further advise thee to leave all thy former exercises where they are, without determining whether they be, or be not genuine, and contemplate these four things, viz.

a. The amazing and unspeakable love of a triune God, which he displays in the salvation of sinners.

b. The need thou hast of Christ, his all-sufficiency as a redeemer, and his preciousness.

c. The free and gracious invitations of life and salvation which God has been pleased to make in the gospel,

d. And that these are made TO ALL who live under its ministration, without excluding any, although they may have lived long in the commission of sins the most aggravated in their nature. We are

warranted in asserting this, from the declaration of Christ himself: *He that cometh unto me, i. e. confesseth only that he is miserable, and seeketh life and salvation in me alone, I will in no wise cast out, be he who he may.* It is my glory, my crown, to save the chief of sinners, and make them objects of my love.

Having now seriously and calmly reflected upon all these things, what thinkest thou is thy duty, on the supposition even that heretofore thou hast never closed with Christ? Is it not that thou shouldst this very moment set about a business of such vast moment? Come then,

4. In the midst of all thy fears and doubts;—
TAKE COURAGE; *run to the Lord Jesus*; venture thy soul upon him, and say with Esther, *If I perish, I perish.* One of these two things thou must choose, ETERNAL DEATH OR CHRIST; there is no Saviour besides him. Act like one who is shipwrecked. He sees before him a plank from the vessel, floating on the waves; and conceiving that by means of it he may gain some adjacent land, he determines to seize hold of it; for says he, “If I do not, I have to look “for nothing but instant death.” Cast thyself now, whilst thy soul is overwhelmed with distress and agonizing doubts, upon Jesus; he is the ark where safety is found. Consider how unbounded is his mercy, how free his grace. On that account, we are bold to declare, not only that thou shalt not perish, but that thy soul shall find his loving-kindnesses manifested. Throw thyself in the arms of Jesus; eternal love, sovereign love, unchangeable love, has caused them to be widely extended. SAVIOUR is his name. His bowels yearn with compassion over miserable

sinners. If to him alone thou fliest, he will receive thee in mercy.

5. Yes, go one step farther, *cordially receive the Lord Jesus*, and say, "PRECIOUS JESUS, if never previous to this time I have taken thee for my Saviour, my all, I now do it. THOU art precious to me, and thou alone; and I will also hasten to thy table, to evidence that I am sincere. Let it please thee, in the eating of bread, and in the drinking of wine, to reveal thyself to my soul."

Who knows, if thou didst act on this wise, but the Lord would grant an answer to thy request, lift upon thee the light of his countenance, make a love visit to thy soul, and say to thee, *I am thy salvation*; At least, thou wouldst act a better part, than through unbelief to be kept so far from his fellowship, and so far from *peace and joy in believing*, which must always be the case, whilst doubts and fears continue.

But before we conclude this lecture, a few things must be said by way of application.

And FIRST,—THOU who art still in thy NATURAL STATE, dost thou say to thyself, "If men are to be saved only in the way which has now been pointed out, then the way to heaven is a narrow way, and the road leading thither extremely difficult!"—And this circumstance ought to awaken thee to serious reflections, for thou hast never gone one step in that way. No troubles, no fears, no doubts have oppressed thy mind. Therefore thou art yet *in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity*. Is it not infinitely preferable to travel for a short season, a narrow and arduous path, and in the end be eternally saved,—than with the multitude to run in the broad road of sin, amusements, and sensual gratifications, and at last be for ever damned?

Or art thou PERFECTLY AT REST, AND UNCONCERNED, thinking thyself SECURE of eternal life, and presuming that Jesus is thy Saviour?— But remember, SINNER, that there exists a vast difference between a false and true assurance. Permit us here to point out wherein the difference lies. It may perhaps be a mean to convince thee that thine assurance is at best but a presumptuous one. The great difference between a *false* and *true assurance* is discovered to lie in the FOUNDATIONS on which they are respectively built, and in the EFFECTS which they produce.

1. A false and a true assurance differ with respect to their foundations.—

a. Properly speaking, he whose assurance is false and imaginary, has no solid foundation for it. But presuming that he has a foundation, it is one which can never stand; for he hath not as yet ever known God, or himself. But the Christian whose assurance is *true* has been taught the character of God, by the light of the Holy Spirit in the word, and from the same source he has learned his own character, and what the Eternal has done for his soul.

b. The foundation on which the ONE rests, is a *sinful love of self*; which induces him, on the first appearance of any good in himself, to imagine that he is reconciled to God. His SINFUL ACTIONS he views with a favourable eye, and considers them at most to be contaminated with guilt and pollution in a small degree, unless they become public. His virtues, which in the view of God are destitute of merit, like the Pharisee, he highly prizes. But the person whose assurance on the other hand is real, discovers in the smallest sin so much evil, that shame covers his face when he appears before God, and he

considers his best performances to be polluted, and altogether as *filthy rags*.

c. A false assurance is built alone on a delusive confidence in *self-righteousness*. It causes not its possessor to forsake the ways of sin. But that assurance which is of the true kind is founded upon the *righteousness of Christ only*. Hence, he that has a genuine assurance, lays himself down at Jesus' feet, he is stripped of all that righteousness with which he once thought himself to be adorned. The precious Redeemer is now his only refuge, and whilst he flies to him, he forsakes the old ways of sin, and bids them an eternal adieu.

2. True and false assurance produce different effects.

a. A true assurance causes the believer seriously to resolve *to live a more holy life, and to walk more tenderly before the Lord*. For his heart being purified by faith from the love of sin, he is disposed to put into practice all the duties of religion. His language is, "Are there so many great and precious promises made to me, and the fulfilment of which in part at least I have experienced, and *shall I not perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord?*"

But a false assurance may always be known by this mark:—the possessor of it is *careless and inattentive to duty*. If he may arrive at heaven at last, and escape the miseries of the bottomless pit, then all will be well. In the mean time, however, he feels not the least inclination to walk in that *narrow way* which leads to the mansions of the just.

b. A true assurance *excites the heart to love God*. The assured Christian admires, with adoring gratitude, that God has designed to look in mercy on one

like him, who by nature is polluted and defiled with sin.

But a false assurance has nothing of this. He who possesses it may address himself with seeming fervour and pathos to others, on the love of the Eternal to sinners of the human race; but in truth he feels not one soft affection move. His heart, whilst he speaks on a subject of a nature so animating, remains perfectly cold.

c. A true assurance produces *humility of heart*. The assured Christian lying low in the dust will exclaim, “What is thy servant, and what thine hand-maid! I am unworthy of the least of all thy mercies and thy truth.” The person who is resting on an assurance that is false, is distinguished for *his pride*. He boasts of his virtues, and conceives that none possess qualities as amiable as those which are found in him.

d. True assurance always makes its possessor *willing to have his heart searched*. He is not ashamed to discover to a fellow Christian all the secrets of his soul,—because he is fearful of being ultimately deceived: and being jealous of himself, he frequently calls also upon his God to search it.

But a false assurance induces its possessor to *shun every thing which has the appearance of investigating the true state of his soul*, because he would not have his peace destroyed by that which would inevitably break down the foundation on which all his hopes have been built.

e. A true believer, although at certain periods he may have felt himself assured, yet he is *not so always*. Sin sometimes intervenes; his walk and conversation is not perhaps so tender as he could wish. Hence proceed fears, doubts, distress. And as assurance was

at first not so easily to be attained, so he knows that it is difficult to be regained; as appears in the case of David, Psalm li. But the person whose assurance is false and imaginary, as it did not cost him much trouble to arrive at it, so he is not at much labour to maintain it. He always remains equally assured as at first.

Lay up, unconcerned and careless sinner, these things in thy heart, and frequently make them the subjects of thy meditation. Scrutinize the foundation on which thy hopes are erected, and see if it will stand in the great day when all hearts shall be searched by that omniscient eye, which pervades the most secret recesses of the material and spiritual world. If thou hast not the *sure foundation* on which to rest whilst thou livest, thou mayest go on composedly enough, but in death thou wilt suddenly be overtaken by everlasting perdition. Is it a work so arduous to administer comfort to the redeemed of the Lord, who are labouring under their various trials? Canst thou imagine that thou wilt so easily be assured, so quietly pass down the stream of life, and land at last on the blissful shores of the celestial Paradise? O consider with due attention the words of Peter—*If the righteous be scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and sinner appear!*

But thou, child of God, whom God has so highly favoured, that thou hast been enabled to believe with more than *common confidence*,—under what strong, what inviolable obligations, art thou, to make some returns for that sovereign, eternal, and unchangeable love, which he hath manifested to thee.

Dost thou now walk in the light? Is all darkness dispelled? With that care with which the bride preserves the jewel, the pledge of her husband's love, do

thou seek to preserve that enlightened view of thine interest in Christ, which the Holy Spirit hath given thee, lest he cause clouds and darkness again to rest upon thee. Dost thou demand, O how shall I preserve it? The question may be answered thus.

1. By walking circumspectly, and in the most tender manner before the Lord—Be careful, Christian, to avoid every act which might tend to weaken thy confidence when in the divine presence.

2. When thou fallest into any sin, arise immediately, return to the Lord with shame and sorrow; confess thy folly; the Lord will in mercy pardon thee, for he knows what sinful creatures we are.

3. Daily renew thy covenant with God. Whenever an opportunity offers, most solemnly dedicate thyself to him, especially when at his holy table thou dost commemorate his dying love. To renew the covenant with the Lord is a new seal of our faithfulness. And thou mayest assure thyself, Christian, that thy God too will not fail to shed *abroad his love upon* thy heart, *his seal* to thee, that he never will forsake thee.

4. Willingly submit thyself to all the dispensations of Divine Providence. It is thy Father “who rides in the whirlwind, and directs the storm.” If his ways with thee *be past finding out*, consider, Christian, it is thy God who reigns. He knows what is best for thee, and therefore give thyself wholly into his hand, and *let him do what seemeth good in his sight*.

But has the ETERNAL enabled thee to believe, ON GOOD GROUNDS, that THOU art one of his children? Pity then thy brethren and sisters in the Lord, who are oppressed with fears and doubts. Deal tenderly, discreetly, and in a friendly manner,

with them. Do they communicate to thee where their wounds bleed, and where most their burdens press? It behoves thee, who art assured of thine own conversion, *to strengthen thy brethren*; for in thine own experience thou knowest that it is not so easy as some imagine to arrive at an assured confidence.

Finally, Christian, go on thy way rejoicing; and should it so happen, that thy light be obscured, and that darkness and clouds rest upon thee, remember, that now the people of God are engaged in a warfare; but that the time is drawing nigh when thou, with all the redeemed, shall shine in the brightness of the sun of righteousness, and, by that light divine, behold the God of thy salvation *eye to eye and face to face*, and without interruption enjoy him for ever and ever.

A M E N.



T H E

PIOUS COMMUNICANT.

Lecture V.

ON THE LIFE OF FAITH.



HAVING, in the two former lectures, spoken of the assurance of faith, and attempted to remove those difficulties which prevent the people of God from attaining to a steadfast confidence of their interest in the merits of the blessed Redeemer, we proceed, in the present lecture, to endeavour to excite those who have assurance to that LIFE OF FAITH which encourages, animates, and causes them to rejoice, as they pursue their journey to the heavenly Canaan.

In doing this, THREE things must be attempted :

I. To shew in what the life of faith consists.

II. To excite the people of God to aspire after a more lively exercise of faith.

III. To point out to them the means of advancing in the divine life.

First, then, we shall shew wherein the life of faith consists. Previously however to this, it is proper to remark,

1. That if it be asked, “ Whether a believer, even
“ in a state of the greatest declension and back-

“sliding, may be considered as living by faith?” we answer in the affirmative; for if it were not so, the believer might fall from grace, which, according to the divine constitution, is impossible. In him, to whom God hath given life, the living principle will abide throughout eternity; grace, that precious *seed* which God hath implanted in the heart, *will remain*; no inherent corruptions are so strong, no infernal spirit so artful, no allurements of the world so seducing, no adversity so distressing, as to be able to destroy it. God preserves his people *by an almighty power*; they are built upon an immovable *rock*, *against which the gates of hell cannot prevail*; the blood by which they are purchased hath an eternal efficacy; the bond of union between them and Christ is too intimate and too firm ever to be broken. The Holy Ghost, which is given to them, *will abide with them* for ever; he is in them a fountain of life, and affords them new and constant supplies of grace; he is the *seal* and pledge of their heavenly inheritance: it is therefore as possible to pluck them out of the hand of the Almighty God, as that they should ever be without faith in the heart: but Christ hath told us, John x. 27, 28, 29, *My sheep hear my voice, and they follow me; and I give unto them eternal life: and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand.* The covenant into which they are brought is a *covenant of salt for ever before the Lord*; perpetuity and incorruption are its essential properties.—In a word, God *will never forsake the work of his hands, he will never suffer the righteous to be moved.* It is true, a believer may fall into grievous sins, so that it may be asked, In what does he mani-

felt that he possesses faith? This was the case with Peter, who three times denied his Lord; but because Jesus *had prayed* for him, his *faith failed not*. Wherefore it was a common saying with Augustine, "When profession languished on his lips, then love glowed in his heart."

Although, at such times, there may not appear to our view satisfactory evidence that the soul is in the exercise of faith, yet faith is in the heart, and affords no inconsiderable proof of its existence, by its hungering and thirsting, and by its earnest desires of deliverance from this lifeless state. Such a Christian strikingly resembles a tree in the midst of winter. It cannot easily be distinguished from the dead trees, among which it may be placed; but the roots being found, as soon as the earth is visited by the refreshing showers and warming rays of a vernal sun, it discovers signs of life. Or he may be compared to a person apparently at the point of death, in whom no signs of life are discovered, excepting now and then a distressing gasp; but afterwards, when he recovers, it is manifest that the vital principle had not entirely forsaken him. The Christian also may be reduced to so low a state as to be in doubt whether spiritual life has ever been imparted to him; but when God afterwards invigorates it, then he clearly perceives that God had awakened him into life by his divine and spiritual influences.

2. If it be asked, "Whether assurance be *essential* to a life of faith, that is, whether a child of God may have no certainty of his being in the faith, and yet really live in the exercise of it?" We reply, It is true, when a person knows assuredly that he has fellowship with God, and an interest in Christ, he is under greater advantages for exercising faith in a

right manner. He can in such a case make more use of the Lord Jesus, and because he can view Jehovah as his covenant God, he will be better able to apply the promises to himself for his strengthening and advancement in the divine life. Yet others, who have never attained to assurance, may act from the living principle of faith, and though they may be afraid to believe that God is their Father and covenant God, and Jesus their Redeemer and surety, still they may evidence their faith to be genuine,

A. When they go on their way, having, on the one hand, a deep sense of their miserable, sinful, and deplorable condition, and, on the other, a clear view of the all-sufficiency and preciousness of Christ, and their need of him; experiencing at the same time a tranquil, ardent, and persevering desire, and breathing of soul after him.

B. So faith is exercised in no small degree, when the soul being in distress or danger, or meeting with sudden or unexpected difficulties, flees from itself to God in Christ as its refuge, and casts itself upon him, without asking, "May I venture to do it? have I faith?"

C. Is a person brought to a sick and dying bed, and is he asked, whether he believes that the Eternal is his God; whether he has an interest in Christ: he will perhaps immediately reply, "O no, I am so much in the dark, that I dare not believe this." But let him be asked again, "What course then wouldst thou take to secure thy happiness in the future world?" His answer is ready:—"I know but one way; I will venture myself upon Jesus, and trust to free grace." And thus exercised, he leaves this world. Is not this faith, even that faith, the end of which is the salvation of the soul?

D. Yes, it may happen, that persons who are not assured, may exercise faith in a higher degree, than some who may have a higher degree of confidence; for the latter, walking in the light, find it easy to believe: but how many are there who walk in darkness; who are, both by day and by night, sorely distressed, that still cleave to Christ, and believe even *against hope*. Did not the woman of Canaan exercise stronger faith than the blind son of Timeus? the former was several times repulsed by Christ; yet she persevered: but the latter received a gracious call, to come immediately to him, and was addressed: *Be of good comfort, rise, he calleth thee*.

Thus much we have thought proper to remark, both for the encouragement of the mourning children of Zion, who are afraid of cherishing a thought that they have faith, and yet at the same time give many evidences that they are in possession of that divine and gracious principle; and to quicken them in the great duty of living by faith.

Having premised these things, we now come to the subject itself,—THE LIFE OF FAITH. Thus, the course of God's people, whilst travelling heavenward is denominated. The prophet says, "*The just shall live by his faith*"; and the apostle of the Gentiles exhorts, *as ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him*; that is, walk in such a manner as when ye received Christ at first, namely by faith. The same apostle declared to the church in Galatia, *The life which I live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God*; and again, *we walk by faith, not by sight*, 2. Cor. v. 7.

We shall FIRST describe this life of faith, and then enlarge on the particular parts of the description.

By the life of faith, we are to understand,

“ That holy exercise of a renewed Christian, by
“ which, from a constant view and a deep impression
“ of his frequent backslidings, sins, and total inability
“ to do that which is good, he keeps his eye and his
“ heart fixed on the great mediator of the covenant,
“ applies to him for all things, and in all circum-
“ stances; and having duly considered the power,
“ goodness, truth, and faithfulness of an unchange-
“ able God, renounces all others, and submits himself
“ to his will, relying on him to make all things to
“ turn out to his advantage; which confidence makes
“ him bold, to oppose all his enemies, and so engaged
“ in the duties of religion, that even in his temporal
“ transactions, his heart is elevated to things above,
“ that thus, by things which are sensible and visible,
“ he may attain to those which are spiritual and in-
“ visible.”

In the above description, there are certain things supposed.

1. It is supposed that the Christian must have and seek to maintain a lively and feeling consciousness of *his being miserable*, having deserved death and destruction, and possessed of nothing by which he can stand acquitted before God; but as in his first conversion, he had need of the blood of Christ to atone for his sins, so he no less requires the same precious blood every moment, to be applied to him for the removal of his daily transgressions, and defects in duty. Such a view of himself will make the believer careful, not only to keep Christ in his sight, but also to walk humbly with his God. This it was that made the father of the faithful confess that *he was but dust and ashes*, Gen. xviii. 27; and this that made David cry out, *Who can understand his errors?*

cleanse thou me from secret faults. Psalm. xix. 12.
To this must be subjoined,

2. An habitual and constant acknowledgment of the soul's *total inability in itself*. For, though in regeneration a principle of grace is implanted in the heart, yet it is a truth, and the daily experience of the children of God confirms the observation, *that without Jesus, the believer can do nothing*. Paul, though an apostle of Jesus Christ, confessed, *that he was not sufficient of himself to think any thing as of himself, but all his sufficiency was of God*, 2 Cor. iii. 5. Not one duty can be performed, not one sin can be overcome, not one temptation can be resisted, without the influence and power of God ; and the more this truth is impressed on the mind, the better it is prepared for the exercise of faith ; for as soon as a person begins to think that he can do some things, by an exertion of his own strength, then faith must necessarily become weaker ; then the soul, in the same degree, loses sight of God and Christ. Then he may be viewed as standing on dangerous ground : Peter relied on his own strength, and denied his master.

3. Again, it is supposed that the believer always KEEPS THE LORD JESUS in his eye, as one ALL-SUFFICIENT, ABLE AND WILLING to help his people in all their needs ; that he acknowledges him to be *the fountain of life*, from whose fulness he receives, and *grace for grace*, which is sufficient to enrich the poor, to fill the empty, and to render happy the miserable ; *the mighty God who is able to give abundantly above what we are able to ask or think* ; *the complete Redeemer* who, by his sufferings and death, hath obtained all blessings for believing sinners ; and by bringing in *an everlasting righteousness*, hath satisfied divine justice, and procured

the remission of sin for his people ; and who, in the character of high priest, and king supreme, is both seated on a throne of grace, and intercedes for his chosen, that they, in virtue of his intreaties with the Father, and of his pleading the merits of his active and passive obedience, may receive all things necessary both for the body and the soul ; for Christ being a *merciful and faithful high priest*, who is *touched with a fellow-feeling of our infirmities*, will give them daily what they need.

4. The believer must also have a deep conviction upon his mind of the VERACITY and FAITHFULNESS of God, as one who will accomplish all his promises ; for the promises of God, and his faithfulness in fulfilling them, are the two immovable pillars on which faith rests. It is said of Abraham, that he was FULLY PERSUADED that what God had promised, he was able also to perform, and therefore *against hope believed*.

These things being taken for granted, we observe that the believer's living by faith consists in the following particulars.

1. In a *constant application to the Lord Jesus*, in all respects, for which he is given by his father to his people, and for which they stand in need of him every moment ; for an abiding sense of INDWELLING SIN, and a daily DEFICIENCY in the discharge of duty, constrain the godly to have recourse to the atoning blood of Christ, for remission, whilst a PERSUASION OF THEIR INABILITY to do that which is good, inclines them to seek for the spirit of Jesus, who is expressly given for the purpose of sanctifying the children of his love ; hence they plead the promise, *I will put my spirit within you, and will cause you to walk in my statutes*, Eze. xxxvi. 27. The POWER

and OPPOSITION of their spiritual enemies induces them continually to call upon Jesus as THEIR KING, to erect his throne in their hearts, to keep within due bounds the power of their adversaries, and to impart to them strength to withstand their assaults. Yes, in every act, whether it be of a temporal or spiritual nature, they wish to keep their eye fixed on Jesus, being sensible that they are not only unable, but also unwilling to do any thing acceptable to God.

But as we purpose, in another lecture, to treat at large on the subject of faith's application of the great mediator of the covenant, we shall not, in this place, be more particular, but proceed to remark,

2. That the second act of the life of faith consists in a holy, humble, reverential, and obedient submission to the will of God. This is accompanied with a renunciation of the believer's own will and inclinations.

A. The believer is submissive and obedient TO THE DECRETIVE WILL OF GOD. Whatever be the divine purposes concerning him, he is silent and adores. In darkness and in light, in prosperity and adversity, in joy and in sorrow, he reveres the ways of God as wise, holy, and good, and says with Job, "*The Lord performeth the thing that is appointed for me*, Job "xxiii. 14. God will not, to accommodate himself "to my wishes, change his counsels; and therefore "it is my sincere desire to follow him in all his dealings with me." The language of his heart is, *Father, thy will be done*. Corrupt nature may indeed sometimes repine at the providences of God, because he often leads his people in dark and dreary paths; but faith opposes its rebellious murmurs, and makes the Christian call upon his soul, "*Wait thou upon God*," Psal. lxii. 6. It leads him to consider what

may be the design of God's dealings towards him, which, though hard *to flesh and blood*, are notwithstanding full of majesty and glory, and will terminate in his everlasting advantage. By faith the child of God will express himself in the language of David when speaking of the ark of God.—*If I shall find favour in the eyes of the Lord, he will bring me again, and shew me both it and his habitation. But if he thus say, I have no delight in thee: behold, here I am; let him do to me as seemeth good unto him,* 2 Sam. xv. 25, 26. By faith, when it is rightly exercised, the soul can bid defiance to all its enemies, and triumphantly exclaim, *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through him that hath loved us,* Rom. viii. 35, 37.

B. Faith makes the soul to submit to the PRECEPTIVE WILL of God, and inclines it to renounce its own carnal will. And in order to this the believer endeavours,

a. *To know with the understanding, and by the judgment to prove what is that good and perfect and acceptable will of God; and therefore he does not counsel with flesh and blood. He does not rest satisfied with the opinions of others, nor follow their evil example; but highly esteeming the word of God, he turns his attention wholly to the law and to the testimony, and there studies to learn his duty. He knows that the will of God is his sanctification, which consists both in the practice of piety, and in an opposition to all that obstructs his progress in it. He is taught, by the divine oracles, that it is particularly required of the Christian to renounce self, to take up the cross, and to follow Jesus; and that the Eternal*

wills that his people *be not slothful in business, but steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.*

b. But faith does not rest satisfied with a bare knowledge of the divine will. The believer is sensible that not the man who only knows, but he who likewise does the will of God, is blessed; and at the same time is persuaded, that a faith which is not accompanied with obedience to the divine precepts, is not acceptable to God. He therefore makes the work of the Lord his daily employment. In the integrity of his heart he says with Israel, “*All that the Lord hath said unto us, we will do,*” Exod. xxiv. 7. He is determined, on THE ONE HAND, through grace, to do nothing which his covenant God hath forbidden. He often thus reasons with himself: “I have given myself to be the Lord’s for ever—I am no longer my own but his; and therefore I must and I will renounce and avoid, as my Father shall enable me, all that he has forbidden in his law. For if I were to observe a different conduct, disregard his commands, join with the world in their pursuits of pleasure, and go with them the round of amusements,—the Eternal, who does not leave unnoticed any conduct of his people, must cease to view me as one of his servants. An inspired penman hath said, “*The foundation of the Lord standeth sure, the Lord knoweth them that are his. Let him that nameth the name of Christ depart from all iniquity.* And hence I now wage an eternal war with thee, O sin. Thy ways are opposed to those of my Father, my God, my Redeemer, my All!”—And, on THE OTHER HAND, the believer will seek in all things to do what God hath commanded, how much soever the carnal principle may be otherwise

inclined. As faith at first conversion makes no exceptions to any of the divine precepts, so in its subsequent exercises, it approves of the whole law. Do the divine commands sometimes seem difficult to be obeyed? Are the reasons of them so concealed that they cannot be discovered? The believer drops the enquiry, and submits to infinite wisdom. It is enough for him to know that such is the preceptive will of God. His conduct resembles that of Abraham, of whom Paul testifies, that when he was called to go out into a place which he should afterwards receive for an inheritance, *he obeyed and went out, not knowing whither he went*, Heb. xi. 8. By this conscientious adherence to the commands of his God, the believer's regard to the law sometimes rises so high, that the world, by its smiles or its frowns, its promises or its threatenings, could not induce him to do any thing contrary to it. Yes, were he put to the proof, he would boldly say with the apostle, *Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye*, Acts iv. 19. As a subject is obedient to his king, a servant to his master, and a child to his father, without asking, why does my King, my Master, my Father thus? So saith the believing soul, It becomes me to keep my will in subjection, and to obey my God in all things.

c. Faith thus exercised will preserve the believer from superstition, and *from being subject to ordinances, the commandments of men*. The word of God being thus made the rule of all his actions, the commandment becomes *a lamp* and the law *a light* unto him; and thus he is taught *how to cleanse his way, by taking heed thereto, according to God's word*.

3. To live by faith also consists IN A HABITUAL

AND WELL-GROUNDED CONFIDENCE IN GOD, in all things, whether temporal or spiritual.

A. This confidence is maintained in ALL SPIRITUAL DISTRESSES.

a. Under a sense of his having backslidden; and in the experience of the power of corruptions. Such doubts indeed may arise in the believer's mind as may make him ready to say, "A state like this is inconsistent with grace. If God were my Father, and Jesus my Redeemer and surety, sin would not exert such power in me. If Christ dwelt in my heart, it would be more purified." But even in the midst of them, he loses not his confidence in God. For has he not been taught to know God as one that is *gracious, merciful, and abundant* in goodness; and has he not experienced the virtue of the blood of Christ to cleanse and to purify? He is encouraged therefore with David to pray, *Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving kindness: according to the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions*, Psal. li. 1. He then considers the divine COMPASSION, and makes it another ground of his trust. "Thou art," says he, "a God who will pardon my sins, and deign to pity me, *as a father pitieth his children. For thou knowest our frames, thou rememberest that we are dust*, Psal. * ciii. 13, 14. Hast thou not declared with thine own mouth? *I, even I, am he that blotteth out all thy transgressions for my name's sake, and will not remember t^h sin*; surely, as a GOD OF TRUTH, thou wilt not fail of performing THIS word which thou hast spoken."— But this is not all; he will plead the atonement of Jesus, he will rest upon his righteousness, and derive support from this fruitful source of encouragement, that he *ever liveth to make inter-*

cession; conscious to himself that the Father, for the sake of the merits of such a mediator, will not wholly depart from him, nor for ever cast him from his presence.

b. The believer maintains this confidence *under spiritual desertions*, when the Lord withholds the light of his countenance from him, hides his face, stands as it were *behind the wall*, and makes him to bewail with the prophet, "My strength and my hope is *perished from the Lord*," Lam. iii. 18. and with Zion, "*The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me.*"

In a case like this, the believer does not yield to despondency, but in confidence lays hold of the promises of God. He recollects with delight that his Father hath said, "*For a small moment, I have forsaken thee, but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath, I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord, thy redeemer,*" Isai. liv. 8. On these promises the soul rests, and firmly relies; because it believes that the God of truth will perform his own word, and *never suffer his faithfulness to fail.*

c. The believer reposes confidence in his God, when *assaulted by Satan*. Does that cruel adversary assail him with his fiery darts, then faith's trust in the Lord is his shield. He hath been taught that Jesus hath cast Satan under his feet, bruised his head, and so destroyed his power, that he cannot injure any who belong to him; and further, that *the God of peace will shortly cast this enemy also under his people's feet, and make them join in their redeemer's triumph over him.*— But

B. The people of God, likewise, exercise a trust in God, *in times of temporal afflictions*. Does God,

for the trial of his people's faith, visit them with sickness, or poverty, or bring them into any other afflictive circumstances? Is there nothing but darkness on every side, without any prospect of relief? Are the ways in which they once expected deliverance obstructed? Do the clouds still thicken and cover their path with impenetrable gloom? Be it so; yet the believer does not give up his confidence, but *trusts in the name of the Lord, and stays upon his God*, in the following manner:

a. He looks off from himself, from all creatures, and from all means on which he once depended; and seeing them to be all vain and ineffectual, betakes himself to God as his refuge, and casts all his concerns, and all his burdens at his feet, acknowledging that his help and deliverance is alone in the Lord; that it is he who bringeth light out of darkness, and that nothing is impossible with him: and hence, he commits his way to Jehovah, that he may order it, and saith, "*Thou beholdest mischief and spite, to requite it with thy hand:*" and it has been often found, that the more dark the Providence, the stronger has been the believer's confidence, that the Lord was near to help and to deliver. He has, in times past, either experienced this himself, or observed it to be so in God's dealings with others, and this makes him to *believe, even against hope*, both that the Eternal can, and will bring salvation.

b. This believing confidence manifests itself in times of afflictions, by causing the Christian to have his eye fixed upon SPIRITUAL, heavenly, and invincible objects.—"O!" saith the believer, "in this life
"I am travelling a dark road, every thing goes
"against me: however if I have but a small por-
"tion of this world's goods, I have an inheritance in

“heaven, which is more durable and far better. My
 “soul expects an eternal salvation, and waits to be
 “put into possession of celestial treasures; these far
 “transcend the trifles of time; and therefore I
 “regard not things *which are seen*. They are tem-
 “poral, mutable, inconstant, unsatisfactory; but I
 “look at those which *are not seen*, which are eternal,
 “and which render the possessor of them happy.”

“I am but a stranger on earth; my country is
 “above, and though now I dwell not *with the Lord*,
 “yet to him my eye is directed, my heart and my
 “*conversation are in heaven*, and I have a believing
 “expectation, that my God will, in his own good
 “time, conduct me thither, there eternally to possess
 “and enjoy the inheritance my Jesus purchased for
 “me, at the immense price of his own most precious
 “blood.”

c. This believing confidence discovers itself IN A
 PATIENT WAITING FOR THE FULFILMENT OF
 THE DIVINE promises, eventhough the period of their
 accomplishment be remote, and God delay to bring
 deliverance. This is, in the style of Scripture, *to be-*
lieve, and *not to make haste*, or, in other words, *to be-*
lieve that he is faithful who promises. Such is the
 trust which the church is represented as having re-
 posed in Zion's God: *I will look unto the Lord; I*
will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will
hear me, Micah vii. 7. Thus, too, Abraham patiently
 waited upon God, and exercised a confidence in his
 promises; for when he was seventy-five years of age,
 God declared that he should have a son by Sarah:
 the accomplishment of that divine word was post-
 poned to his hundredth year; still he trusted, though
 the event appeared most unlikely to take place. It is
 said of him, *that he staggered not at the promise of*

God, through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God, being fully persuaded that what he had promised, he was able to perform, Rom. iv. 20, 21.—

And Paul testifies of the pious Patriarchs, that although they *had not received* the promises of possessing the land of Canaan, *they were persuaded of them*, embraced them, and died believing that the promised event would take place; and the Apostle notices it as an evidence of their confident expectation, that they might have returned to the land of their fathers; but *now they desire a better country*, Heb. xi. 13.—

Thus does the soul that trusts in the Lord conduct itself, though it see not the event, it still waits for it, with that patience which removes all the obstacles that unbelief casts in the way: appearances may be discouraging; God may defer the period of fulfilling his word; yet the believer will not give up his hold; but, as the husbandman waiteth patiently for the harvest, *so will he wait for the Lord*: in whatever circumstances he is placed, he does not indulge a painful anxiety, to know what may be the issue of things, but commits all to the direction of God, who orders every event. No tongue can express, no language describe how comfortable, how delightful it is to follow where Jesus leads, as a child follows his father! Is the child of God led in thorny paths, and made to drink of the bitter cup of affliction? or is he made to lie down *in green pastures beside the still waters* of comfort? all is well, because it is the appointment of God; and this consideration is sufficient to beget an holy unconcern.

4. The life of faith discovers itself in THAT HOLY COURAGE by which the believer OPPOSES ALL HIS ENEMIES, till, through divine assistance, he obtains a complete victory. He is, indeed, sensible of his own

inability to engage in this spiritual warfare; but he remembers that God hath promised that his foes shall fall before him. Does this make him careless, or inactive? No; it leads him to practise the mysterious art of faith (which no one knows, but he that hath been taught it of the Lord) in order that strength and light may be obtained from Jehovah, to fight against sin, Satan, and the world, and to make a vigorous stand against them. Is the believer assaulted by SATAN, he keeps his eye fixed upon Jesus, the great captain of his salvation, who goes before him, and sustains the heat and burden of the conflict. If the infernal Goliath *come forth with his sword and his spear*, he can then say with David, "*I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel,*" 1 Sam. xvii. 45. And having formerly experienced the help of his God, he also still depends on him, and with the poet sings,

"He that has help'd me hitherto,
 "Will help me all my journey through;
 "And give me daily cause to raise,
 "New Ebenezers to his praise."

Does SIN seek to obtain the mastery over the believer? he is enabled by faith to see that Christ, by his death, hath given to sin its death-wound; that he has to contend with a vanquished enemy, who shall never succeed in his attempts against him. Do corruptions at times rage, and disturb his repose? faith brings the Christian to the feet of the Saviour; it calls in to his aid the spirit and strength of Christ, it pleads the virtue of his merits, and his promise, *that sin shall not have dominion over his people*.— Does the WORLD seek the destruction of the believer by

its persecutions, scoffings, contempt, or its various seductions? by faith he overcomes the world, and rests on the promise of the glorious Redeemer, "*In the world, ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world,*" John xvi. 33.—By faith, with Moses, he esteems *the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he has respect to the recompense of reward.* Heb. xi. 26.—Faith makes him confess that all that the world presents to its votaries, are, at best, but temporal blessings; whilst those which Jesus presents to his followers, are durable and eternal; that the former constitute an insufficient portion, that cannot satisfy the heart; whilst the latter form a store-house of blessings, all of which afford comfort to the soul in life, in death, and throughout an endless eternity. Hence the Christian is induced to despise the honours, the pleasures, and the riches of the world, when set over against the delights and consolations which he enjoys in the communion of his God.

5. The person who lives by faith, *daily* ENGAGES IN THE PRACTICE *of true godliness*, and endeavours to do all things, whether of a religious or civil nature, in a right manner, and to a right end.

A. We have asserted, "that the person who lives by "faith, daily engages in the practice of true godliness," and it is a fact; for faith is the root whence genuine godliness springs, and by faith it is exhibited in a holy walk and conversation.

a. The believer seeks to advance in DIVINE KNOWLEDGE; for, as faith is built upon the testimony of God, that testimony must be well known, if faith shall remain steadfast. Hence the believer is not satisfied with having the first principles of reli-

gious knowledge; but he presses forward to perfection, having his eye upon the divine declaration, "*Then shall we know if we follow on to know the Lord,*" Hosea vi. 3. He does not however content himself with a bare speculative knowledge, but is anxiously concerned to have an experimental acquaintance with the truth, that is, to taste its sweetness, and feel its efficacy on the heart, and also to express his sense of its excellence, in his whole walk.

b. Faith manifests itself by producing in the soul LOVE TO GOD. Hence the Apostle speaks of faith, as working by love, Gal. v. 6. Love discovers the sincerity of faith: if a man believes that he is an object of the love of a triune God, and that God, even from eternity, has had thoughts of love towards him, how can he do otherwise than glow with affection to him? Melted into tears of love, he expresses himself in this pathetic language: I will love thee, O Lord, my strength, Ps. xviii. 1.

c. The exercise of faith produces true thankfulness, as well for spiritual as for temporal blessings. The language of faith is, "*Giving thanks unto the Father who hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.*"—*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings, in Christ Jesus.*—The soul which believes that it is enriched with the blessings of the kingdom of God, cannot but break forth into exclamations like those we meet with, Psalm cxvi. and ciii. "What shall I render to the Lord, for all his benefits towards me: I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord. Bless the Lord, O my soul! and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul! and forget not all his benefits."—But, if the

praises of God be upon the tongue of every believer, for blessings of a spiritual nature; and if it delight him thus to glorify the Eternal as the beneficent giver of all things respecting the soul, think not that he is unmindful of the temporal bounties which his Father may have bestowed upon him. He beholds his reconciled God dealing them out to him; he considers them also to be benefits which his Redeemer hath purchased for him, and therefore to express the gratitude with which his heart is filled, *he presents his soul and body a living sacrifice, holy, and acceptable unto God.*

d. Faith is the fruitful parent of GODLY FEAR. For although it be true, that by faith the Christian is admitted to fellowship with God, and may hold an intercourse with him as a reconciled Father, and a covenant God; yet because he has been taught, that the Eternal *is high and lifted up, and dwelleth in light inaccessible and full of glory, and that he is holy, righteous, omniscient; the King of kings, and Lord of lords, infinitely exalted above all creatures;* he is impressed with a deep sense of the splendor which surrounds his throne, and of the glory of his majesty, and this makes him circumspect in his walk; so that on the one hand, he would do nothing to displease him, and on the other hand, is disposed to do every thing in order to obtain his divine approbation. This holy fear of God, leads the Christian to adapt to himself the language of JOB, “*Destruction from God was a terror to me, and by reason of his highness I could not endure,*” Job xxxi. 23.—And of JOSEPH—“*How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God,*” Gen. xxxix. 9.—Thus he *serves the Lord with fear, and rejoices with trembling.*

e. Faith produces the fruit OF LOVE TO OUR

NEIGHBOUR, which makes the believer solicitous to bring others also to the enjoyment of fellowship with God. "O!" says the believing soul, "that my friends, " my acquaintance, who are living without God, " might yet become partakers of true faith."—This sincere desire of heart the Christian often brings before his God, and prays earnestly for their conversion. Yes, the believer discovers this love to his neighbour, by endeavouring to discharge all the duties which he owes to him; he is merciful, peaceable, friendly, patient and moderate in his carriage towards him.

f. Faith in lively exercise produces a HEAVENLY FRAME of mind; it leads the soul to the contemplation of the things which are above. The believer looks upon heaven as his eternal home, views God as his father, and considers Christ to be his covenant head, surety, and glorious high Priest and King. He surveys the inhabitants of the celestial world, who have been conducted thither, by faith in the Lamb of God, as his relations, and the angels as his *fellow servants*; *for faith gathers together in one, all things, both which are in heaven and which are on earth.* The believer, contemplating the glories of the invisible world, discovers too, the invaluable blessings that are there reserved for him, and the discovery inspires him with fresh courage under every affliction, and causes him to think comparatively little of things below. By faith the Christian, with Moses, *endureth as seeing him who is invisible*, Heb. xi. 27.—By faith, with Abraham, *he looketh for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God*, Heb. xi. 10.

g. Faith causes the believer to WALK HUMBLY WITH HIS GOD; for having attained to a knowledge of his sinfulness and unworthiness of the least

mercy, and daily experiencing how far he comes short of the glory of God, he is made to cry out with Job ; “ *I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes,*”— Job. xlii.

Hence it is that believers are not only afraid of commending their performances, but are compelled to acknowledge that their best actions are defiled with sin, if they be not sprinkled with the purifying blood of Christ ; and whatever good they see in themselves, they ascribe to free grace, saying, “ By the “ grace of God we are what we are.”

h. Faith has also an influence upon TRANSACTIONS IN CIVIL LIFE : it makes the believer keep his eye steadfastly fixed upon God in all his temporal affairs ; it leads him to enter upon nothing without looking to him for his direction and blessing. Faith keeps him from murmuring when things go apparently against him, and produces thankfulness in prosperity. Faith enables him in all doubtful matters to choose the safest way ; that is, rather to abstain from what is lawful, than to extend his Christian liberty too far, and wound his brother. He follows the example of the apostle, who though for himself, he had freedom to eat flesh, yet would rather deny himself that privilege, than lay a stumbling-block in his brother's way.

B. But is faith so productive of acts of piety ? It also directs to a performance of them in a RIGHT MANNER, and to a RIGHT END.

a. In a right MANNER, according to the prescription of the word of God, which always must be the rule of our actions. By faith the believer is led first to attend above all things, to the concerns of the soul, and then to those which are necessary for our temporal comfort ; and not only so, but to perform

every thing in its proper season ; that is, not to be so much employed in the affairs of this life, as to leave but little or no time for those of a spiritual nature.

b. And to a right END, to glorify God in all things, agreeably to the exhortation of Paul ; *whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God,* 1 Cor. x. 31.—This inclines the believer to look off from himself, preserves him from an undue concern to please either himself or others, and disposes him to make the approbation of God his chief and constant aim ; and this principle carries him so far, that on the one hand, if God may be glorified, he will omit no duty, whatever persecutions may await him on its account ; and on the other hand, no honours or advantages that can be proposed, will induce him to do any thing, by which the name of God may be dishonoured.

6. The life of faith manifests itself in the constant practice of FERVENT PRAYER, by which the Christian cleaves to God, to Christ, to heaven, as a girdle to the loins of a man. In prayer, the believer expresses not only his strong affection for his God and Redeemer, but his devotedness to him, and fixed purpose of serving him. His language is, “ Lord ! here “ am I waiting thy commands, persuaded that thou “ wilt never call me to any duty, which thou wilt “ not enable me to perform, nor put me upon any “ trial, which thou wilt not give me strength to endure.” Nor is faith more eminently exercised in any kind of prayer, than in those devout ejaculations, and holy aspirations of soul, which he directs to a throne of grace. The efficacy of such prayer is very extraordinary, as has been witnessed by Moses, Nehemiah, Daniel, and others.

7. Lastly, faith is employed in the CONTEMPLATION of the objects of sense in such a manner as to lead to those which are SPIRITUAL and DIVINE. For instance ; Does the believer cast his eye upon the *sun of nature* ? his mind is immediately led to investigate the glories of the sun of righteousness ; Does he behold the *plants* and flowers in all their *beauty* and *elegance* ? the eye of faith will trace all these to the hand that made them, and the believer will have his soul impressed with this important truth, that thus too he ought to grow, and bring forth fruit unto God. Does he view the heavens in all their splendor ? his mind is instantaneously elevated to the THIRD HEAVEN, the seat of joy and everlasting salvation. In a word, whatever he beholds, whatever he does, raises his soul to things invisible and spiritual.

See thus what it is to live by faith.

We have, in as concise a manner as possible, delineated the whole walk of a Christian, to the end that every one who looks upon the beautiful picture might be enamoured with it.

We must now, in the SECOND place, endeavour TO EXCITE AND URGE the people of God, TO PROCEED in their journey to heaven, walking by faith ; for, although this road be so charming and delightful, and at the same time so necessary to be pursued ; yet there are many of the children of God, that travel it with a slothful and sluggish step.

O PEOPLE OF GOD, what reason have ye to be *ashamed* ! Ye live, it is true, by faith, for without faith, ye could never enjoy fellowship with God, since that divine principle is the bond which unites you to him. But where is your ardor, your activity, your engagedness in the exercise of faith ?

Many of you have been, for a number of years, on the way ; but ye have made little progress, because ye are for ever doubting of your state, and continually saying, “ We are afraid it is not yet right “ with us.”— Ye will live by sense, but not by faith, and therefore ye keep almost constantly in the same condition. How improper such a conduct ! ye ought to rest upon the divine testimony. Have ye ever been enabled to determine favorably of yourselves ? it behoves you to hold fast the foundation on which ye have been made to hope, and thus oppose all the suggestions of unbelief. For want of this, your faith is only exercised in its weakest acts, of desiring, hungering, thirsting, and running after Jesus, whilst that holy and firm confidence that lays hold of the eternal rock of salvation, and of the promises, is an exercise of which ye know but little in your own experience. And, though it be true, that a weak faith is sufficient for salvation, yet it is not enough to afford you that comfort and encouragement ye need upon the way.

Seek then to obtain a well-grounded assurance of your state. Let not little things alarm and disturb your peace : ye have to do with a faithful God, who will preserve alive the smallest spark of grace, and can encrease it into a flame.

But there may be some among you, who, though ye may be CONFIDENT of your good estate, yet LIVE NOT by faith, as ye ought to do. Ye are not sufficiently impressed with a sense of your guilt and pollution, of your inability, and unworthiness ; for, though ye have received grace, yet ye are daily chargeable before God, of innumerable failures in duty ; which however do not suitably affect your minds ; and therefore it is that ye do not more earnestly apply to the blood of Jesus, for pardon. Ye

do indeed confess, that *without Christ ye can do nothing*; but constantly by faith to look to him for wisdom and strength in every transaction, spiritual and temporal, is a thing with which ye are but little acquainted. When, depending on yourselves, ye have ventured to engage in business, or duty, without looking for direction and influence from above, how often have ye been put to shame? whilst, on the other hand, when deeply impressed with a sense of your own insufficiency, ye could only lift your eye to God for help, ye have found his grace *sufficient for you, and his strength made perfect in your weakness*.— All this is designed to teach you to look from second causes, and to live by faith. Yet where is that believing and CALM SUBMISSION to the will of God? Every thing goes well, when the sun of prosperity beams upon you, when you can *wash your steps in butter*; but when the clouds of adversity gather thick around you, and horrid gloom darkens your way, how are your hearts disposed to murmur! Does God call you to part with something that is dear to you? you are not, like Abraham, willing to offer up your Isaac. It may indeed be your wish to be in such a frame; but, O how hard is it for you to yield a tacit submission to the will of God!

In times of spiritual or temporal distress, in what do you evidence the exercise of CONFIDENCE? Does God hide his face from you, do all things appear TO GO AGAINST YOU? ye are cast down, unbelief gains strength, ye are afraid to rely upon the promises, or to consider God as your father. Does SATAN beset you with his fiery darts? ye take not the *shield of faith*, to ward them off; but are dismayed: fear gets hold of you, and ye dare not oppose him.— However, remember your enemy is ever on the watch,

and attacks with unrelenting fury, when God's people are off their guard. When providences are adverse, and prospects so dreary, that not a ray of light appears, your minds sink INTO DESPONDENCY, instead of COMMITTING all your concerns into the hands of God. Such conduct dishonours God, and evidences a want of faith in his power, as being able *to bring light out of darkness*.

How little activity do you manifest in exercising those Christian graces which have been described! O which of us must not be compelled, with shame, to confess his sinful deficiencies? but to see them, and to confess them, is not enough; it becomes us, in the strength of the Lord, to seek to amend our ways.

Be exhorted then, believers, to be more steadfast, immovable, and progressive, in this walk of faith.

1. Ye cannot have a firm assurance of the SINCERITY of your faith, if it work not by love; and be not accompanied with endeavours, through grace, to discharge the duties of true religion; for if faith urge not the soul to these, it more resembles a dead, than a living and true faith. This the apostle James teaches, Chap. 2. 17.—Although it be certain, that those who have faith can never be deprived of that principle altogether; yet, when it is not constantly in exercise, it is weakened; as one who has learned any liberal or mechanic art, by disuse, loses much of his skill, whilst constant practice would yield him daily improvement; so it is with the believer: by negligence he suffers a visible declension, whereas, by a constant and lively exercise of faith on the Lord Jesus, he gains much strength, his evidences are proportionably brightened; his doubts are removed, and his fears subside.

2. By exercising faith, the Christian ADVANCES

IN HOLINESS; for, as faith purifies the heart from the love of sin, so it makes the soul zealously engage in all the duties of religion.— Faith teaches its possessor constantly to keep in mind his inability, and thus leads him fixedly to keep his eye upon Christ. Faith is the hand which lays hold of Christ, and his strength. By faith the believer runs after Christ, and brings the empty vessel of his heart to an all-sufficient God and Saviour, to be filled. Have ye then any desires of becoming more holy; let faith be much in exercise: it is the best mean which can be employed, in order to satisfy those desires.

3. By exercising faith, we shall be able, in the name and strength of the Lord, to make a noble, manly, and bold **STAND** against all that oppose us. By faith we are taught to expect opposition; but by faith too we are enabled to lay our hands upon the promises, the oath and the faithfulness of God, and humbly plead them before him. By faith, we look upon Christ as the captain of salvation, and strengthened by his power, in the midst of the combat, we may triumphantly exclaim, "*In all these things, we are more than conquerors, through him that hath loved us.*"

4. Faith enables the Christian to go on his way, replete with joy and comfort; for

A. As the believing soul is not easily shaken as to its state, so it can rejoice in having fellowship with God, and in all the blessings which flow from it.— Yes, believers, ye *can rejoice in the hope of glory.*

B. In **PROSPERITY**, faith makes the Christian truly grateful. He enjoys temporal blessings, confessing his unworthiness of the least favour, in the language of the venerable Patriarch, "I am less than the least of all thy mercies."— He is sensible

that, by faith, he has a covenant right to all he possesses ; for he sees that Christ, to whom faith unites his soul, hath purchased all these things for his people.

C. In ADVERSITY, when distresses and afflictions arise from every quarter, faith enables the soul to commit, with an holy unconcern, its all into the hands of a faithful God, who always careth for his children, and to rest in the promises of him, who hath said, “ *I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.*”

5. The walk of faith, not only affords a comfortable and a pleasant life, but prepares the way for a JOYOUS AND BLESSED DEATH. In the lively exercise of faith, the soul with pleasure contemplates its dissolution from the body, as the appointed mean by which it shall be admitted to immediate communion with its God in heaven, where we shall see *eye to eye, and face to face* : on a death-bed, the believer may say with Jacob, “ *I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord ;*” and with Paul, “ *I have kept the faith.*” It is true, God may in that hour withhold the light of his countenance ; but it will only be to put faith to its last trial ; and, even in that case, there still remains a waiting upon the Lord ; *for the righteous hath hope in his death.*

6. This stable walk of faith is strongly recommended to you, by a consideration of that CALM SERENITY of mind which it affords, on the occurrence of SUDDEN AND ALARMING EVENTS, respecting either yourselves, your families, or the land in which you live ; when unconverted sinners shall fear and tremble, and flee into their *inner chamber* ; and when those who have but little faith, shall with Peter, and the rest of the Apostles, cry out, “ *Lord save us, we perish.*” Matt. viii. 25. then shall ye, who are accustomed to commit yourselves to God,

have boldness to fly unto him, as the rock of your salvation, and as your *strong habitation, to which ye continually resort*. Then ye may consider yourselves as safe in your father's hand, and depending on his faithfulness, say, "*I will trust, and not be afraid* ; " for the Lord is with me."

7. Such a walk of faith GLORIFIES GOD ; for the believer depends upon him as a gracious and all-sufficient God. To live by faith, makes us look from every other object but Christ, and to confide in him alone : faith humbles the proud heart, and causes us to think little of ourselves. When we are brought to confess, that for all we have, we are indebted to free grace, saying with Paul, *By the grace of God*, we are what we are ; then we will not prize our virtues, nor set a high value on our best performances. If a believer does any thing for God, or his cause, he ascribes it not to himself, but to the *grace of God* which *dwelleth* in him ; and as he receives every thing from God, so, by faith, he is disposed to render back unto him, all the praise, and all the glory.

8. People of God, ought ye not to be desirous of leading such a life of faith, when ye consider that it is THE MEDIUM through which EVERY BLESSING comes ? By faith *ye have access* to the throne of grace, where you may commit all your concerns to your father, God ; by faith *ye receive* out of his *fulness, and grace for grace* ; by faith ye have a RIGHT to all temporal blessings, even though ye possess them not, and are poor and despised by the world ; spiritual blessings, eternal felicity, ye may consider as yours ; yes, by faith Jesus dwells in your hearts, and your hearts in heaven, even now, whilst ye sojourn below.

9. Do ye, Christians, live here by faith ? ye shall have the HONOUR after death, of being enrolled

amongst THE CLOUD OF WITNESSES, of whom Paul relates, that they *all died in the faith*, Heb. xi. 13. When ye shall no more be numbered with the inhabitants of this world, the fruits of your faith shall remain. It shall then be said of you, as it was once said of Abel, *Though dead*, he yet speaks. Those who in this life, make the greatest progress in the walk of faith, are held in the highest estimation after death.

Is there then so much glory and happiness connected with the life of faith? Is it your desire thus to live? and do you ask, "How shall we attain to such a life?"

The third thing proposed was, to lay before you some of those MEANS which enable the Christian to advance in the divine life.

We shall first give some GENERAL directions; and then shew in what respect the LORD'S SUPPER is a MEAN of promoting the life of faith.

The GENERAL directions we would offer, are the following:

1. Seek to OBTAIN AN ASSURANCE of your being in a gracious state, grounded upon the word of God. Have ye, by marks drawn from that divine source, and by examining your hearts by those marks, found that ye might venture to believe that ye are the children of God? do not, too easily, give up your hope, nor too readily yield to doubts and fears; but reason thus with yourselves: "If the work hath been done in truth, God is faithful; *his gifts and calling are without repentance*, and therefore, the work of grace begun here, must and will be consummated in glory." In proportion as this foundation is weakened, your comfortable advancement in the divine life of faith will be obstructed; and therefore, in the words of Peter, we exhort you, "*Give all diligence*

“to make your calling and election sure; for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall.”

2. Be not too much set upon having your COMFORT and JOY derived from a FEELING sense of divine grace, and of the operations of the Holy Spirit. If it please the Lord to grant you those sensible evidences of his love, be thankful; highly prize, and carefully preserve them; but if ye have not these experiences, consider that now ye are not so much called to feel as to believe; the former is transitory, but the latter remains when feelings cease; the one produces a tender, steadfast walk, but the other renders it wavering and unsteady. As long as a person has a feeling of the love of God, he conceives that hills and mountains must fall before him, and says, “I shall never be moved;” but does he lose this feeling sense, the least unfavourable circumstance alarms him, and he is ready to give up all for lost. But faith continues though midnight darkness rest upon us. By believing, we keep a fast hold of the word and promises, and thus temptations of every kind lose much of their power.

3. Devote a part of every day IN SEARCHING the Scriptures; it is necessary for Christians to add constantly to their stock of knowledge. Faith is strong in proportion to one's acquaintance with divine truths; ignorance is the parent of unbelief. If a person be but little versed in the Scriptures, how liable is he to be sorely distressed, when he meets with opposition, from foes internal or external! whilst he who is established in the truth, with ease surmounts the difficulties which may come in his way. Endeavour, then, to learn from the word, *“What is that good, and perfect, and acceptable will of*

“*God,*” and make that the rule of your walk and conversation.

4. Firmly resolve, in the strength of the Lord, TO LIVE circumspectly, and to WALK in the path of HOLINESS: nothing destroys our Christian confidence like sin: indulgence in it causeth God to hide his face; hence arises a fear to apply the promises, and we dare not approach the throne of grace. The word of God represents faith and holiness as intimately connected, insomuch, that those who are celebrated for their boldness in faith, are commended as having been most exemplary in holiness.

5. GO CONSTANTLY BY FAITH TO CHRIST; seek in his blood the pardon of all backslidings; sensible of your own inability, hasten to him for strength; plead the word which he himself hath spoken, “*Without me ye can do nothing,*” and then trust in that arm divine, by which ye can do all things. Thus to be daily and hourly engaged, is the true way of living by faith, and none are thus employed but those who have received a believing heart.

6. In every circumstance of your lives, MAKE USE OF THE DIVINE PROMISES. Ye cannot be in any situation, nor be called to any duty, but ye will find some precious word on which ye may hope for help, support or deliverance. Confide in that which a faithful God hath spoken, and apply to him to fulfil what he hath promised, saying, with David, Ps. cxix. 49, 50. “*Remember the word which thou hast spoken to thy servant; on which thou hast caused him to hope: thy word hath quickened me.*”

7. Place constantly in your view those heroic believers who have gone before you, and have travelled the same road. By doing this ye may be animated and encouraged. *Their faith follow, considering the*

end of their conversation, Heb. xiii. 7. It is said, that in the Grecian races, the portraits of the most illustrious heroes, and of the swiftest racers, were placed in full view, to the end that others might be excited at least to equal them in their respective attainments. For the same purpose, many eminent examples are exhibited in the word of God. Go then *in the footsteps of the flock*; and duly consider the force of this apostolic exhortation: “*Seeing then we have so great a cloud of witnesses, let us run with patience the race set before us.*” But, besides these general means, THE HOLY SUPPER OF THE LORD is particularly designed; and when used in a RIGHT manner, greatly conducive to the believer’s ADVANCEMENT in the life of faith: for as baptism signifies and seals the ingrafting of a soul into Christ, so the Supper of the Lord is intended to strengthen believers in the divine life. A child that by its birth receives life, has need of constant nourishment, that it may acquire strength and growth; and so does the child of God much need that nourishment, which he may expect from this holy ordinance, so well adapted to promote his furtherance in grace, whatever may be his situation.

1. Art thou saying, “I have but just begun the walk of faith; I am only a babe in Christ; all that I have experienced is but a desire, a looking, a longing for grace, and an interest in Christ.” O! come to the table of the Lord, even in such a frame; there thou mayst see Jesus in his all-sufficiency, ready to satisfy all thy desires. As the tender infant eagerly pants for the breast, to be nourished by it, pant thou after ELSCHADDAI, the all-sufficient God. This word is derived from another, which signifies A FULL breast, to intimate, that in God, there is a

complete, an inexhaustible fulness, and a willingness to impart out of that fulness. Come then, open thy mouth wide, that it may be filled; earnestly desire the sincere *milk of the word*, that thou mayst grow thereby. We are bold to assure thee, that the most affectionate mother is not so much disposed to cherish the infant of her bosom, as the all-sufficient Jesus is to replenish, with his grace, the soul that comes to him; and this he seals in the sacrament of the Supper: the more hungry, thirsty, empty, thou art, the fitter object thou art for being filled and satisfied.

2. Art thou afraid to acknowledge that thou hast experienced, EVEN THE FIRST EXERCISES OF FAITH? Must thou complain that thou art weak, feeble, and ready to sink beneath thy heavy burden; that thou hast a sin-sick soul, and a *wounded spirit*? With all these maladies, it is thy duty to go forward to the table. Is not Jesus the PHYSICIAN who binds up the broken-hearted, who has a medicine suitable to every disease? Art thou cast down because sin still cleaves to thee? the BLOOD of Christ is a FOUNTAIN *opened for sin*, and for uncleanness. Art thou entangled in the affairs of the world, and unable to extricate thyself? Jesus seals in this sacrament, that he has procured for thee his spirit to sanctify thee; and moreover, has promised to all his people, *strength* according to their day. Lay thy hand, then, upon the promises; keep fast hold of them by faith, and remind Jesus of his own words, and he will accomplish all that he has declared. There is no wound so great, but he can heal it; yes, wert thou even leprous from head to foot, so that thou wert compelled to cry out, *unclean, unclean*, thy Jesus can effect a cure; and thou hast not reason to doubt of his disposition to do both; for he is *the merciful high priest*,

and he solemnly seals this to thee in the sacrament of the Supper.

3. Are there any sincerely engaged in the divine life, who, however, for their strengthening and establishing, are DESIROUS OF MORE COMFORT AND SATISFACTION, by SENSIBLY TASTING THAT THE LORD IS GRACIOUS? In this holy ordinance, *bread* is offered to strengthen, and *wine* to make glad *their hearts*. Jesus calls you, saying, “Come eat of *my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled.*” Here you may be abundantly satisfied with the *fatness* of God’s house, and *drink of the rivers of his pleasure*; but keep it always in mind, that this spiritual nourishment is imparted to you, that in the strength of it, you may travel through the wilderness of this world, till you in safety arrive at the *mount* of God above. Elijah was nourished by the food which Divine Providence had prepared for him, *forty days, until he came to Horeb*; in like manner must you seek to be strengthened, not for *one day*, but from one communion sabbath to another.

You may perhaps say, “This would, indeed, be the case, were I to continue in that comfortable frame in which I found myself at the table; but it often happens, that I have no sooner left it, than I lose that comfortable and delightful experience of the *love of God shed abroad on my heart*, and hence my soul is again enveloped in darkness.” This may, indeed, be the case with thee; for God designs by this to teach thee not to *walk by sight*, but by faith. Hath God sealed anew his promises to thy soul? live then upon them, and consider with thyself, that now thou art called to live BY FAITH, and that the SENSIBLE ENJOYMENT is reserved for thee in heaven. God will give thee to experience

his love, and impart new courage and strength, to fight against thine enemies : thou wilt find that Satan is never more active in tempting to sin, or in making his assaults, than when it has pleased the Lord to refresh thy soul. Under such a trial, thou wilt be ready to conclude, that all the benefit of the ordinance is lost ; but this may be a very false conclusion. In such circumstances, believer, it is thy duty *to watch, to stand firm in the faith, to quit thyself like a man, to be strong* ; and for thine encouragement, know, that thy God will give thee new pledges of his love, to increase thy faith, and to establish thy confidence in his faithfulness.

But before we close this lecture, we must add a few words by way of APPLICATION.

First. To you, who are yet in A STATE OF NATURE, still *dead in trespasses and in sins*, the truths which have been delivered and elucidated, *are for signs and for wonders* : ye are strangers to them, at least by experience : all that ye can possibly know of them is speculative ; for *the natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God* : and because ye are not, as yet, truly acquainted with the first principles of faith, how can we possibly exhort you to LIVE by faith ? O ! that ye could but once see the miserable situation in which ye are ! If ye live not by faith on earth, you CANNOT LIVE eternally.—What do we say ? not live throughout eternity ! You shall indeed live ; but that life will be infinitely worse than death ; it will be a *life of shame and everlasting contempt*. O ! that ye were but brought so far as to be enamoured with that *walk of faith* which we have been depicting ! that ye were made to enquire after the *good way*, and to walk in it ! for as long as ye are straying in the ways of sin, and wandering in its destructive

paths, ye have no part in the privileges of the people of God. Hence we have no warrant, no freedom, to invite you to the table of the Lord ; for all that is there transacted and enjoyed is only by faith. Lay yourselves then at the feet of Jesus, plead with him effectually to work faith in your souls, and to make bare his omnipotent arm, to illustrate his glory in your salvation. But,

Secondly. Afflicted soul, thou whose faith is weak, dost thou thus complain, “ Much have I heard, as to “ what it is to live by faith ; but instead of proving “ any encouragement to me, I am in great doubt “ and fear, lest to this very day I am destitute of true “ faith ; so little it is that I know of all what I have “ heard. By what marks may I ascertain, whether I “ am a subject of spiritual life ? ” We answer,

1. The EMOTIONS and FEELING SENSE of divine things, which thou dost experience, is an evidence that THOU HAST LIFE ; for one that is dead is destitute of feeling. Touch him, make incisions in his flesh, he remains motionless ; it is just so with the dead sinner : if he be addressed in a manner the most affectionate ; if all the curses with which he is threatened ; if all the judgments which are reserved for him in the stores of heaven be set before him, he is indifferent still. Now permit us to ask thee, “ Is “ not thy heart easily moved, and affected with tenderness, when thou hearest proclaimed in thine ears, “ the wretchedness of the sinner, the fulness of the “ Saviour, and the great privileges of those that fear “ God ? ” And are not these certain signs that thou hast life. But we would not presume to assert, that all who are occasionally made to tremble, because sin lieth at their door, or become impressed with the reality of things of eternity under sermon ; or who

appear much affected at times, when the love of Christ is set forth, as abounding to the chief of sinners, have this spiritual life. No, our sensibility must go hand in hand.

2. With a PRACTICE evidential of life.—If our emotions proceed from life in the soul, we will be brought to bow before the Lord, to lay our burdens on the omnipotent arm of Jesus, which *is never shortened that it cannot save*; and to seek from him that grace which we need. Hast thou experienced this? Dost thou not know what it is to wrestle for mercy at the throne of grace?

3. Art thou not HABITUALLY HUNGERING, THIRSTING, RUNNING AND CRYING AFTER CHRIST? Is there any thing which would more delight thy soul, than to be found in him, and enjoy his grace, even in the smallest degree? Must thou not answer in the affirmative? and say, “The Lord is my witness, that it is the desire of my soul to renounce all things, to cast myself upon him, and to evidence this by causing *my* light to shine before men?” Hast thou been thus exercised? Then we are bold to assure thee, agreeably to the word of God, that there is wrought in thee, the principles of true faith, and therefore be exhorted to live the life of faith, and to make progress in it.

And in the mean time, comfort thyself with this hope, that thou who art now living by faith, shalt hereafter walk by sight. The staff of faith shall not only conduct to the Jordan of death, but over it, where thou wilt lay it down, and throughout eternity enjoy those blessings for which, by faith, thou hast been long waiting; *even salvation and glory, world without end.*

A M E N.

T H E

PIOUS COMMUNICANT.

Lecture VI.

ON THE PEACE, JOY AND TRIUMPH OF
FAITH.

HAVING, in the preceding lecture, treated of the LIFE OF FAITH, and delineated the course which the Christian pursues, in his journey towards the heavenly Canaan, we purpose, now, to invite your attention to some of the BLESSED EFFECTS, which a life so holy, and a course so pleasing to God, produce. The effects to which we particularly allude are, the *peace*, the *joy*, and the *triumph of faith*. Our design, in treating on these subjects, is, on the one hand, to encourage the children of God, who have commenced travelling the road of faith, to proceed in it with ardour and zeal; and on the other, to allure such as are yet in a state of nature, to make choice of a course, in which they may meet with *peace* and *joy*, both in life and death.

We shall reduce what we have to say on these subjects, to the three following heads:

1. We shall explain the NATURE of the peace,
F f

joy, and triumph of the Christian, and shew how they proceed from faith.

2. We shall enquire, whether these fruits of faith are found in ALL believers, at ALL times, with a view to administer comfort to the weak and distressed Christian.

3. We shall then attempt an application suitable to various cases and circumstances of men.

But before we proceed to consider these several subjects, we would remark, that if it be asked, “Why we confine ourselves to the *peace, joy, and triumph* of faith, since there are many other fruits, “which the life or walk of faith produces?” we reply,

1. Because, in the lectures which have preceded, we have occasionally mentioned many of the blessings which faith brings in its train.

2. Because, in the present lecture, which will conclude the interesting subject of faith, we propose exhibiting that grace in its highest degrees, as in the last, we pointed out its lowest exercises.

3. Because, the PEACE, JOY, and TRIUMPH of faith include all the other fruits which result from it.

Having premised this, agreeably to the FIRST thing which was proposed, we now solicit your attention to each of the fruits of faith, above mentioned.

The FIRST in order is PEACE; by which we understand, “That gracious work of God in the heart
“of a believer, by which, his former enmity being
“removed, a mutual friendship takes place between
“him and his God; from which flows a holy com-
“posure of mind; in every vicissitude of life, as well
“as peace with all creatures.”

According to this description, we shall consider what this peace PRESUPPOSES; then speak of the PEACE ITSELF; and lastly, its effects.

1. It presupposes, that man, by nature, is an enemy to God; for were there no enmity, there would be no necessity of making peace: the idea of peace also implies, that the enmity which once existed is removed.

Man, at first, created in the image of God, enjoyed fellowship, and held sweet converse with his Maker, as with his most intimate friend; but by the intervention of sin, this friendship was destroyed, and man hath become an enemy to God; he lifts up the weapons of rebellion against him; he *stretcheth out his hand against God, and strengtheneth himself against the Almighty; he runneth upon him, even on his neck, and upon the thick bosses of his buckler, and saith, depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways,* Job xxxv. 25, 26. And God, on the other hand, who cannot but hate sin, and whose holiness and justice are dishonoured by it, is become an enemy to man; for *the foolish shall not stand in his sight; he hateth all workers of iniquity,* Psalm v. 6. As an enemy to God, man comes into the world, and in this awful state he lives; for, says Paul, Rom. viii. 7. *The carnal mind is enmity against God.* Yes, and in this awful state he must have died, if God himself, even from eternity, had not entertained thoughts of peace, and arose to deliver him from his wretched condition. It was his infinite WISDOM that devised the plan of setting apart the Son of his love as mediator and surety; and his unspeakable GOODNESS and infinite power, that executed redemption's glorious and astonishing plan, when he actually sent him into the world; for then it was the

divine Jesus took upon him the human nature, to satisfy injured justice; to do and to suffer all that it required to be done and suffered. By this mean a way was opened for God to propose terms of peace to sinners; for, as the evangelic prophet observes, *The chastisement of our peace was upon him*, Isai. liii. 5. And the great Apostle, *God is in Christ reconciling the world unto himself*, 2 Cor. v. 19.

This peace, thus devised by God, and purchased by Christ, the ETERNAL offers to every person who lives under the light of the gospel, whenever he puts the word of reconciliation into the mouths of his ambassadors, and sends them forth to *pray* the children of men to be *reconciled* to God, 2 Cor. v. 20. But such is the opposition of sinners, that all this would be insufficient, if the Holy Ghost did not exert his almighty power on their hearts, to convince them of their enmity; to make them confess it with shame; to incline them to cast away their weapons of rebellion; to renounce their own righteousness; to receive the righteousness of Christ by faith; and thus to *make peace*, even peace with God.

2. With respect to the peace itself, we remark,

a. That the AUTHOR of it is GOD, who is therefore called *the God of peace*, 2 Thes. v. 23. and the blessing itself is denominated, *the peace of God*, Phil. iv. 7. for he hath both devised and ordained it. This peace is ascribed, particularly, to JESUS CHRIST; who is, on this account, styled "*The Prince of Peace*," Isai. ix. 5. The *Shiloh*, or peace-maker, Gen. xlix. 10. He calls this peace, his peace, John xiv. 27. *My peace I leave with you*; for he hath purchased this peace *by the blood of the Cross*, Col. i. 20. But it is the HOLY GHOST that applies to the soul, the peace which Christ hath purchased; wherefore, *peace*

is enumerated among the fruits of the spirit, Gal. v. 22. *The fruit of the spirit is peace ; and the kingdom of God is expressly said to consist in righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost, Rom. xiv. 39.*

b. The SEAT in which this peace is found, is the HEART ; for it is called, *the peace of God, which keepeth the heart and mind, Phil. iv. 7.* We mean the HEART of the *believer*, who is brought, by faith, within the bonds of the covenant ; who, having laid down the weapons of his rebellion, hath, by faith, taken refuge under the wings of the *Prince of Peace*, and thus hath become righteous before God. Paul considers justification to be the FOUNDATION of peace, Rom. v. 1. *Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God.*

c. This peace CONSISTS in “ an internal, secret, “ and familiar exercise of friendship with God.”

GOD, on his part, discovers himself to be a reconciled God, and manifests his love, by making secret communications of grace to his people ; for, *the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him ;* by permitting them, constantly, to approach his throne, to enter into the secret place of his sanctuary, and to hold sweet converse with him as spiritual priests ; by accepting their prayers, and lending an attentive ear to the voice of their supplication, and granting them, day by day, *the desires of their hearts ;* and, in a word, by addressing them in these delightful words : *Be not dismayed ; I am your God,* and by encouraging, animating, and strengthening their souls.

BELIEVERS, on their part, express peace and friendship towards God, by drawing near to him continually in prayer ; by casting all their cares and burdens upon their covenant God ; by soliciting counsel and direction in all trying circumstances ; by in-

treating a return of his favour, and giving themselves up to him anew, after having backslidden; and by persevering in pleading his promises.

3. This peace and friendship with God, produce a variety of blessed effects; hence proceeds,

a. PEACE OF CONSCIENCE; for when the soul is reconciled to God, and enjoys such familiar intercourse with him, conscience does not *accuse*; but as the deputy of God, proclaims, in the name of God, *Peace, that peace which passeth all understanding*, Phil. iv. 4. and which is the *answer of a good conscience* towards God, 1. Pet. iii. 21. And, whenever this peace of mind is experienced, then nothing can give the believer any disturbance; but in all circumstances in which he may be placed, he can, with a holy boldness, lift up his head. When SATAN brings any accusation against him, he will be able to say with Paul, *Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth; who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather that is risen again; who is even at the right hand of God; who also maketh intercession for us*, Rom. viii. 33, 34. Under a feeling sense of INDWELLING sin, the believer flies to the righteousness of Jesus, to be found in that alone. Does he ENJOY temporal prosperity? he finds a double satisfaction; for his mind being at peace with God, he is certain that what he receives, comes from a father's hand, and views it as a pledge of his paternal affection; and besides, the gifts of that heavenly parent, communicated in providence to him, produce that exquisite delight in the soul which believers always experience, when feeling their obligations to God, they are enabled to speak in the grateful language of the Psalmist: "*What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits*."

“towards me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord.” In *adversity*, this peace makes the mind calm and composed; and is the sheet-anchor on which the believer quietly rides in the midst of the severest gales. When this peace is interrupted, the believer enjoys no comfort, until he can say, *“Return to thy rest, O! my soul; for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee.”* In a word, this peace is the fortress in which the Christian is safe, when ASSAULTED by enemies, or THREATENED with dangers.

b. From peace with God, proceeds not only peace with conscience, but also, PEACE WITH ANGELS, who are *ministering servants, sent forth to minister to them that are heirs of salvation*, Heb. ii. 14. These heavenly hosts are constantly employed in guarding the elect; for we read, Ps. xxxiv. 7. *The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him. As chariots and horses of fire*, they preserved Elisha from falling into the hands of the king of Assyria, 2 Kings vi. 17. Yes; they wait to escort the souls of believers, at death, from earth to Abraham's bosom; to that heavenly state of glory, in which they shall be kept in everlasting security.

c. All the FRIENDS of God, as well those in heaven as those on earth, are at PEACE with those who have peace with God; *they are fellow-citizens of the saints, and of the household of God*; they have one and the same mediator, who reconciles them to God; one and the same spirit who works in them; they travel one road; have one end in view, and shall at last enjoy the same glory.

d. They have peace with all the CREATION OF GOD. Nothing which the eternal hath formed can injure them; for *all things work together for their*

good. They view all things as under the care and direction of Divine Providence for their benefit, seeing they are Christ's : the curse which lay upon the creatures on account of sin, is removed ; heaven and earth are on their side ; the very *stars in their courses*, if necessary, fight for them ; and *they have made a covenant with the stones of the field*, Judges v. 20. Job v. 23.

e. They are at peace even with DEATH. That enemy from which our nature universally recoils ; which the unconverted sinner, who is still at enmity with God, most dreads, when he beholds him near, and which, even the gracious soul, considering him as coming to part it from the body, and to give it over as a prey to the devouring grave, must view as *the king of terrors* ; the believer beholding himself at peace with God, through Jesus Christ, who has taken away the sting of death, can consider death as a friend, who comes to take him by the hand, to lead him to life eternal ; and hence it is that he can often meditate on his approach, not only with composure of mind, but with joy, and even long for his coming, exclaiming with the poet,

And does this mud-wall'd cottage shake ?

I long to see it fall,

That I my willing flight may take

To him who is my all.

Burden'd and groaning then no more,

My rescued soul shall sing,

As up the shining path I soar,

“ Death, thou hast lost thy sting.”

O precious and invaluable fruit of faith ! how desirable to enjoy PEACE with God !

The SECOND benefit which we mentioned is JOY :

Of this joy of God's people, frequent mention is made in the Sacred Scriptures : it is enumerated among the blessings that belong to the kingdom of God, which not only consist of *righteousness* and *peace*, but also of JOY, Rom. xiv. 17. Therefore believers are often exhorted to the exercise of it : thus the Psalmist addressed Israel, Ps. xxxiii. 11, *Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice ye righteous ; and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart :* and Paul exhorts, *Rejoice in the Lord ; and again I say rejoice*, Phil. iv. 4. By this joy we are to understand, “ That delightful tranquillity and contented frame of mind, which is wrought, by the Holy Ghost, in the heart of a believer, who is at peace with God, which proceeds from a clear apprehension, and sensible enjoyment of the favour of God, and from a believing view of his interest in all the covenant blessings purchased by Christ, which, in part, he already possesses, or for which he *waits in hope* ; which holy frame manifests itself both in words and actions.”

1. The AUTHOR of this joy is GOD ; for it is spiritual, heavenly, and divine ; which none but the Eternal can produce ; therefore David calls God *his exceeding joy*, Psal. xliii. 4. It is numbered among the fruits of the spirit, Gal. v. 22. The Holy Ghost produces it, by accompanying the word and ordinances with such divine influences, as to discover to believers the excellence of those privileges and blessings which are the matter of their joy ; and by this discovery to let them see their interest in those

blessings : hence arise a sweet calm, and satisfaction of soul.

2. The SEAT of this joy is the HEART of a believer, who is made righteous before God, enjoys peace with him, and is brought within the bonds of the covenant. Thus, saith the Psalmist, Psal. iv. 8. *Thou hast put gladness in my heart ;* and again, Psal. cv. 3, *The hearts of them rejoice that seek the Lord.*— In respect to outward things, the believer may have much cause of sorrow ; and yet his heart may leap for joy in God ; for, when his *flesh and his heart faileth*, God is the strength of his heart, and his portion for ever, Psal. lxxiii. 26. This joy can be experienced only by one who is at peace with God, and is brought into a covenant relation to him ; for, as the *wicked have no peace*, so neither are they partakers of this joy : if externally they seem to rejoice, yet, “ *even in laughter, the heart is sorrowful,*” because *they live without God in the world.*

3. The MATTER of this joy is GOD himself, and all the BLESSED and GLORIOUS PRIVILEGES, which arise from communion with him, both in time and in eternity. The wicked may rejoice, when *their corn and their wine increase*, when *they fare sumptuously every day*, and when every worldly thing succeeds to their wishes ; but pious souls rejoice in the Lord, as their CHIEF GOOD, as one who is more to them than a thousand worlds : they rejoice in their eternal ELECTION, that God should cast an eye of pity and compassion on them, whilst he passed by so many others ; they admire the WAY in which God applies that salvation which, from eternity, he had determined to bestow ; and are lost in admiration, when they behold ALL to rest upon the active and passive righteousness of Jesus Christ. In a word, ALL the blef-

sings purchased by Christ, and promised in the covenant, are matter of joy to the people of God. They rejoice that God should FORGIVE their sins, which would have ruined them for ever, by graciously declaring them righteous in Christ; that he should adopt into his family those who, by nature, are among the chief of sinners; and betroth them to his Son, giving them an interest in all his riches and treasures; and that he should BESTOW upon them, not only all that they need in time, but what is still greater, “*a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,*” 2 Cor. 4. 17.

4. This joy itself is a delightful tranquillity and holy SATISFACTION of soul, which manifests itself,

a. In those lively AFFECTIONS which arise in the heart, from contemplating God as an all-sufficient and covenant God, who possesses all perfections, and displays them, not only in his works of nature, but of grace. Here, *with open face, the believer beholds, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, and is changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the spirit of the Lord.* There is besides, in this joy, a lively view of the blessings of the covenant; and this is the *unction of the Holy One, by which we know all things*, 1 John ii. 20.

b. This joy not only manifests itself by a mere contemplation of these objects, but it also evidences its existence, when God, by the internal witness of his spirit in the heart, assures the believer of HIS SAVING INTEREST in all those blessings. Is he assured that God is his God; that he is an object of his everlasting love; that all his sins are pardoned; that the all-sufficient Jesus, with all his riches and benefits, are his? no tongue can express what sa-

tisfaction it affords, what delightful emotions it raises, and what composure of mind it creates.

c. But this joy is still farther increased when God, by gracious RETURNS of love, gives the believer a lively SENSE of his goodness; so as not only to enable him to say, "*I know in whom I have believed, and that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him;*" but when embracing him in the arms of his love, he says to him, "*Son, be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee; I am thy salvation; fear not, I am thy God.*" This voice the believer knows as well as Mary did that of Jesus, when he called to her by name, *Mary!* and she answered, *Rabboni!* *my master.* This, indeed, is *to eat of the hidden manna*; this is *to be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of God's house*; this is *to drink of the rivers of his pleasure*; this is *to receive the white stone, in which a new name is written, which no man knoweth but he that receiveth it.* And what is this new name, but CHILD of God?

d. This internal affection of the mind, which is styled JOY, is, with great propriety, denominated *cheerfulness* when it discovers itself by WORDS and ACTIONS.

A. Joy expressing itself by WORDS, celebrates the praises of God's majesty, and speaks of all his wonderful works. This *corn makes the young men cheerful*; and this *new wine, the maids*, Zach. ix. 17. Joy in the heart makes the tongue to be much employed in declaring and shewing forth the glories of the great Triune.

B. Joy in the heart will evidence itself by ACTIONS. The affection of joy experienced by a natural man, qualifies him the better for business; in like manner, spiritual joy makes the Christian *to run and not be weary, to walk and not faint*, Isai. xl. 31.

Therefore David says, Ps. cxix. 32, *I will run the way of thy commandments when thou shalt enlarge my heart.*

5. The PROPERTIES of this joy, according to Peter, are two: it is *unspeakable*, and *full of glory*, 1 Peter, i. 8.

a. It is an UNSPEAKABLE joy; for one can better experience it than express it by words: hence it is called the hidden manna; and with equal propriety, Paul asserts, that “*It passeth all understanding.*” We may likewise exclaim, *eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard* what it is. Not only is the natural man wholly unacquainted with it; but even the experienced Christian is unable fully to describe it.

b. It is also a joy FULL of glory; not only because it is wrought in the heart by the *spirit of glory*, but because, in its very nature it is glorious.

A. How far does it TRANSCEND all WORLDLY joy, which at best is but empty and vain, extends only to objects of time, and can never afford satisfaction: yes, in the midst of such joy the heart is sorrowful; but the joy of the Christian, having for its objects things spiritual and divine, is substantial; it fills the heart with such supreme delight, that with Mary, it can say, “*My soul rejoiceth in God, my Saviour,* Luke i. 46.

B. It is a glorious joy, because it is FIRM and STEADFAST; for Jesus hath declared, “*Your joy no man taketh from you.*” It will remain when every thing else forsakes us; so that the believer can sing in the delightful strains of the prophet Habakkuk, “*Although the fig-tree shall not blossom; neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the*

"stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation," Hab. iii. 17, 18. Yes, frequently, in seasons of the greatest AFFLICTION, the believer experiences this joy in the highest degree: though with Job, he *sit among the ashes*, deprived of every temporal comfort, and destitute of every thing to cheer the heart; yet even then he can be *glad in the Lord*, and *rejoice in the hope* of that portion which is laid up for him in heaven. In POVERTY and NAKEDNESS, a sense of the goodness of God can make him water his bread with tears of joy; he can rejoice that he has for the *lot* of his *inheritance*, the all-sufficient Jesus, who is infinitely of more worth than all that the world can afford: yes, in the worst of times, this joy can make him, with the Church, exclaim, *"Though the earth be removed; though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea, there is a stream which maketh glad the city of our God,"* Ps. 46.

c. It is a glorious joy, because it advances the Christian in HOLINESS. The more this joy is experienced, the more meekly, the more humbly, and the more tenderly he walks with God.

To the PEACE and JOY of the believer may be added, a THIRD fruit of faith; the holy TRIUMPH of faith, which proceeds from them as the stream from the fountain; to this fruit of faith allusions are often made in the word of God: thus, we read, Isai. xlv. 25. *In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel glory.* And Paul says, *We stand and rejoice in the hope of the glory of God; we glory in tribulation also,* Rom. v. 2, 3.

By this triumph, we understand, "that lively and courageous exercise of an assured but humble Christian, which, from a view of his fellowship with

“ the triune God, and interest in the benefit of the
 “ covenant, either in possession or prospect, makes
 “ him to esteem himself truly happy, and, compara-
 “ tively, to despise all inferior things.”

It therefore excludes all kinds of *boasting*, and glorying in himself; in his own *wisdom*, *strength*, and *worthiness*; for, *let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, nor the strong man in his strength, nor the rich man in his riches, but let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he knoweth me, saith the Lord, Jer. xix. 24.* Hence we find him described as clothed with humility, and, with the father of the faithful, confessing that he is but *dust and ashes*. The only ground, therefore, of the triumph of faith, is a believing view of God in Christ, as the portion of the soul, and the blessedness thence arising.

This triumph of the believer is a magnanimous exercise of the soul, by which he esteems himself to be in a happy and glorious state; for he triumphs

1. In the TRIUNE GOD; that Jehovah the FATHER is his father; that he is one *born of God*; that he who was by nature a *child of wrath*, and Satan's slave, hath been adopted as a child of God; and that *God hath made with him an everlasting covenant*. Surely that man cannot but exult and triumph, who hath the God of heaven and earth for his God; who is enabled to view the Eternal as one who hath loved him from eternity; who will never cease to love, and will permit him to hold sweet fellowship with him. Will the favour of a king, who is but a worm of the dust, inspire courage? how much more animating to reflect, that sinful dust, very worms, may hold intercourse with the King of heaven!

The believer triumphs in CHRIST and his merits, as his SURETY, as his *foundation and chief corner-*

stone, upon which he is so firmly built, that the gates of hell shall never prevail against him; he glories in all his riches and inexhaustible treasures. "O!" says the soul, "I was NOTHING; but in Christ I have "all things, and can do all things; I was poor, but "he hath made me rich; I was IGNORANT, but he "hath been made of God unto me wisdom; I was guilty, but he hath been made unto me righteousness; "I was WEAK, but he hath become my strength; "and therefore I neither want nor desire any thing "besides him."

The believer triumphs in the SPIRIT OF GLORY who rests upon him; who, by faith, uniting his soul to Jesus, puts him in possession of all his benefits, dwells in him, refreshes, seals, assures and comforts him by his divine influences. As the believer triumphs in God, so he likewise glories

2. IN TRIBULATION, Rom. v. 3. Not in tribulation as such, as it is a consequence of sin, and produces pain and anxiety; for in this respect, the Apostle declares, that *no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; but he glories in tribulations, as dispensations of a reconciled God and father; as tokens of his love to him; for, whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.* And since he experiences delightful evidences of the loving kindness of God in his afflictions, he becomes assured that *the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in him.* Yes, he triumphs in tribulations, because they bring him nearer to God, wean him more from the things of time, and make him long more for heaven. It is in seasons of afflictions that he says with David, "*Before I was*

"afflicted I went astray, but now have I kept thy word."

3. The true believer triumphs over ALL his ENEMIES; by faith he can lift up his head, and boldly resist all their assaults. Does the LAW, in loud thunders, utter its curses against his innumerable transgressions? he can exclaim, in the language of the Apostle, *"There is now therefore no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus;"* for he is enabled to behold him as that complete Redeemer who hath fulfilled the *righteousness of the law*, and condemned *sin in the flesh*: clad in the garments of his *salvation*, he greatly rejoices in the Lord. Does CONSCIENCE accuse him of his numberless errors and defects in duty? he triumphs in this, that he has a surety who can and will put him in possession of complete salvation; one who *is the advocate with the Father, and hath been made a propitiation for all his sins*; whose blood is of infinite value and perpetual efficacy. Does SATAN, the accuser of the brethren, lay any thing to his charge? Does he seek to disturb his peace; to alarm his fears, and shake his confidence; he can triumph, and, addressing the adversary, say, *"Get thee behind me, Satan; the Lord rebuke thee, even the Lord who hath chosen Jerusalem; I am a brand plucked out of thy hands; I have nothing more to fear from thee; my surety, to whom I am united by faith, hath engraven me in the palms of his hands; I know that nothing shall separate me from his love, and that I shall be more than a conqueror."* In this way the believer can rejoice in the *salvation of his God*, and in his name lift up his banners. Is he despised or hated by the WORLD? he glories in being among the number whom the King of kings *delighteth to honour*. Does the world endeavour to allure him by its charms, its grandeur, its riches and its pleasures?

he triumphs in the cross of Christ, *whereby the world is crucified to him, and he to the world.* The cross of Christ is his crown,—the reproach which Jesus suffered, his honour; and his wounds, his refuge and hiding-place.

4. The believer triumphs OVER DEATH, and in the view of an approaching JUDGMENT; and because the bond of union between Christ, the prince of life, and his soul, is so close and intimate, he can on better grounds than Agag could, exclaim, “*Surely the bitterness of death is past;*” for Christ, by his death, hath taken away the sting of death, and made it the entrance into eternal glory. The triumphant believer is not afraid of appearing before the bar of God; for the judge is his friend, his surety, and his advocate; he has therefore nothing to expect, on that solemn occasion, but the approving sentence of Jesus, his redeemer and Judge. Hence he may despise all that his enemies can do, and lay aside all his fears, saying, in the bold language of Paul, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?”

5. The believer triumphs in the prospect of future GLORY: Paul speaks of *rejoicing in the hope of glory*, Rom. v. 2. and Peter observes, “*That the end of faith is the salvation of the soul.*”

This triumph consists in that full and joyful confidence which the Christian hath, that when he shall have arrived at the end of his race, fought the good fight, and obtained the victory, he shall receive the crown of life. This confidence is founded upon the first fruits, and foretastes which he has already enjoyed of heaven; and the happy effect which it produces is, that by it the Christian is quickened to have his conversation in heaven, and his life more holy.

A. This triumph PRESUPPOSES, then, that the

Christian has a full and joyful CONFIDENCE that he is reserved for heaven, and heaven for him ; because he has already been made to partake of its first fruits, and to enjoy a prelibation of its blessedness. But in what do these first fruits consist ?

a. In a lively APPREHENSION of the glory of the life to come : heaven, in a manner, descends into the soul, or the believer is led into heaven ; and thus beholds the Eternal, the Lord Jesus, and the blessed spirits who are before the throne, as if present with them, which causes him in extasy to cry out, “ *Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard,*” 1 Cor. ii. 9.

b. In affectionate ASPIRATIONS of soul towards God ; in holy COMPLACENCY and ardent desires, and in receiving a gracious RETURN from God, by his EMBRACING the believer in the arms of his love ; so that, on the one hand, the believer professes, “ *I love thee, O Lord, my strength ;*” God, on the other hand, replies, “ *I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore with loving kindness have I drawn thee.*”

c. In that JOY unspeakable, and full of glory, of which we have already spoken.

Now when the believer experiences all these, in a less or greater degree, he has a foretaste of heaven, as an *earnest of his future inheritance*. These are the first fruits which insure the full enjoyment ; for after the first fruits, the harvest is gathered in.

B. The triumph of faith, as intimated before, consists “ in his having a prospect of enjoying that salvation in its perfection, of which he has already had some foretaste.”

“ O, faith the believer, is a SIGHT of God here “ on earth so delightful, though it be *but as in a glass* : “ *darkly*, or, as it were, by the light of the moon and “ stars ? how ravishing must be the view, when I

“shall enter into the *palace of the king*, and there
 “behold him *face to face*, where all darkness shall be
 “for ever excluded ; where there *shall be no night*,
 “where the glory of the Lord shall be the *light of*
 “the holy city!” Is it here so sweet and comfortable
 to experience some small discoveries of the LOVE of
 God to us, and of our love to him? what trans-
 port shall possess the soul, when this love shall be
 increased to a flame, and continue for ever to burn
 without diminution! Is the present JOY of the
 Christian so great as to make him look upon all the
 evils of life as light afflictions? how transporting
 must it be in heaven, where there is “*fulness of joy in*
 “*the presence of God, and at his right hand, pleasures*
 “*for evermore ; where everlasting joy shall be upon*
 “*his head, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away!*”

c. The EFFECT produced by faith triumphing is,
 “That the believer is QUICKENED to maintain a
 “heavenly frame, and a holy walk and conversation ;”
 which manifests itself,

a. In a constant SEEKING of the things which are
above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God.
 The triumph of faith makes heaven present to the
 believer’s view, and leads him, in the midst of all his
 worldly concerns, to be much employed in contem-
 plating the mansions prepared for him in his Father’s
 house ; “for, *where his treasure is, there his heart will*
“be also.”

b. In a comparative DISESTEEM of the things
which are on earth ; as beneath the attention of the
 Christian ; for he possesses riches and blessings, which
 are of such a nature, “that they satisfy the unbound-
 “ed desires of his soul :” while the men of the world
 make temporal things their chief good, the spiritually-
 minded view them as unworthy of an anxious

thought. Hence it is that in prosperity they are not unduly elevated, and that in adversity, they possess that composed resignation which arises from the contemplation of that better, and more durable inheritance, which is reserved for them in heaven.

c. In a lively HOPE, and earnest LONGING for the blessedness of heaven; for which, however, the believer patiently waits till God's appointed time; assured that he will never *forsake the work of his hands*, but *perfect* what he has begun, the Christian confidently expects that he who, by his grace, has brought him into the heavenly road, will conduct him in it, until he has obtained *the end of his faith, the salvation of his soul*.

Thus, we have briefly shown in what consist the peace, the joy, and the triumph of the Christian. Let us now see HOW each of these flows from faith.—It is by faith that the believer takes hold of the righteousness of Christ, by which he is justified; and being justified, as the Apostle declares, *he hath PEACE with God*. A sense of reconciliation and peace with God, cannot fail of producing JOY; and joy, when it is unspeakable and full of glory, rises to *triumph*. Hence the Psalmist connects joy and triumph together, when he says, “*My soul shall make her boast in the Lord: the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad,*” Psal. xxxiv. 2.—Precious, indeed, must that faith be, which is productive of effects so heavenly, so divine!

We now proceed to the SECOND thing proposed, which was, to inquire whether ALL these fruits of faith are found in ALL believers, at ALL times.

It is certain that the PRINCIPLE whence they proceed, is found in all true believers; for, however weak faith may be, still it unites the soul to Christ, and

consequently gives it an interest in his saving benefits. But all believers do not at all times experience them in the DEGREE in which they have been described. God, in his dealings with his people, displays both his sovereignty and wisdom : one passes through life in darkness, and in discouragement, having only a faith of adherence ; another is permitted to taste a few drops out of the cup of consolation, to keep him from fainting by the way : if he discover any light, it is but faint and transient ; whilst others walk in the light of God's countenance, rejoice in his name all the day, and with the eunuch, *go on their way with gladness*. God knows what each of his children needs. Sometimes they are brought into such trying circumstances, that, did they not experience a sweet *peace and joy in believing*, they would sink beneath their heavy load. Hence we may find many rejoicing in the midst of tribulation ; and hence the martyrs, who have been called to suffer bonds, imprisonments, and cruel deaths, have had this affection raised to the highest degree. Thus variously does God dispense the measures of his grace, as his infinite wisdom sees fit, and by this he teaches us,

1. That such *comfortable experiences are not absolutely necessary for salvation*. They are, indeed, sweet and delightful to the soul, and strew the way to heaven with flowers ; but the present time is the period in which we are to live by faith, upon the divine word and promises, which, as an index by the way-side, points to the road leading to the heavenly Canaan. It is truly pleasant to travel, having the light of the SUN to direct us ; but by the light of the MOON and STARS, we may still make progress in our journey. Here *we walk by faith*, 2 Cor. iii. 7.—To walk by sight, is reserved for heaven.

2. By such dispensations, we are taught that the comfortable experiences of God's love, are not conclusive evidences of our being MORE ADVANCED IN GRACE than others. The reverse is often true : hence we frequently see those who are but commencing the divine life, enjoying those manifestations of divine love, whilst others, who have been long on the way, are destitute of them.— The pilot that sails amongst rocks and shoals, in the dark, exercises more skill in navigation, than he who, in pleasant weather, at noon-day, steers the ship. It is greater grace to believe, and not to feel ; to trust, and not to see, than to walk in the light : hence he who experiences the fruits of faith in a high degree, has no cause of pride, but of great humility and thankfulness.

3. It is no evidence, because a person enjoys the fruits of faith, as they have been exhibited, that he is, on that account, more PRECIOUS in the sight of God than others ; for God takes pleasure in his people upon no other ground but the righteousness of Christ, with which they are adorned ; and, whether we are in a higher or lower degree sensible of our interest in that righteousness, we may be equally acceptable to God. Besides, the promises are not made to those who have a feeling sense, but to them who confide in Christ : for this reason, weak believers ought not to be discouraged, or conclude that the work in their heart is not genuine, because they have not those consolations which others enjoy. Their hearts ought not to be troubled ; for have they only found their souls cleaving to the Lord, holding him fast, looking to him, and waiting for their Jesus ? they have, as has been proved at large, true faith, and consequently true grace.

We now proceed to the THIRD thing proposed,

which was to apply the subject. And in the first place, we have a word to address to thee, POOR and DELUDED WORLDLING ! Is the state of the people of God so glorious ? Is there in the service of God so much peace and joy, and cause of triumph ? why art thou not more charmed with that service ? that thou hast such low and mean conceptions of it, and confidest a life of piety to be necessarily connected with gloom and melancholy, that a person upon becoming a Christian, must bid a final adieu to all pleasure.—Thy language is, “such a sorrowful life would “put an end to all my enjoyments.”—But thy erroneous judgment arises from this circumstance, that thou hast never experienced the supreme pleasure and satisfaction which they receive, who pursue the paths of religion. Didst thou but know what it is to be an enemy to God, and what the dreadful consequences are of being in such a state ; how precious wouldst thou esteem PEACE with God ! how desirous wouldst thou be of reconciliation with him ! Nothing but the blindness of thy heart, makes thee to pass on in security in thy sins. Hadst thou ever tasted of the Christian’s JOY IN GOD, in but a small degree, thou wouldst have found more real satisfaction in it, than the world ever has afforded thee. Yea, didst thou but know what it is to elevate thy head in HOLY TRIUMPH above all difficulties, how quickly wouldst thou change the judgment thou hast formed of the service of God ! But, because thou hast no satisfaction but what may arise, perhaps for a moment, from the gratification of sense, thou hast drawn the unwarrantable conclusion, that sensual gratifications constitute the happiness of man, and that the pleasures of religion are imaginary and vain. True it is, thou dost pass cheerfully through the world, possessing a kind of

PEACE; but it is not that which Jesus gives, and *which passeth understanding*. Thy peace arises from supine indifference, and a wretched insensibility; it is as different from the peace of which we have been speaking, as life and death, heaven and hell. And art thou anxious to know wherein the difference lies? we answer, in the following particulars:

1. Thy peace is the creature of the imagination; it is a peace which rests upon NO FOUNDATION; for thou hast never felt any real sorrow of heart because of thine enmity against God, and thy alienation from him. Thou hast never taken refuge to Christ, the *Prince of Peace*, nor laid down the weapons of thy rebellion. But the children of God never attain to peace with God, without more or less of sorrow for sin: the enmity in which they lived before conversion, has deeply affected their hearts; this has produced such disquietude of mind as has caused them to cry out for pardon, and made them fly to Christ for reconciliation.

2. Thou art not willing to have thy peace DISTURBED; thou art offended with any one who would disquiet thy repose; if conscience is alarmed, thou sayest with Felix, "*Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee;*" and thus thou settlest thyself in thy former security. But the man who has really obtained peace with God, is notwithstanding often distressed, because he distrusts his own heart, and therefore is willing to be disturbed, and to see the worst of himself: he often supplicates the throne, "*Search me, O! God, and try me,*" Pf. cxxxix. 23.

3. Thy peace permits thee TO LIVE AT EASE in thy sins; thou sayest within thyself, "I shall have peace, though I walk after the imagination of my

“heart.” But the more peace the child of God enjoys, the more careful he is to live soberly and righteously before God. He is aware that the least indulgence in sin breaks in upon the friendship which subsists between God and his soul; and therefore he walks circumspectly, and *works out his salvation with fear and trembling.*

Now if, upon examining thy heart, thou canst not discover these marks, thou mayst be assured that thou art destitute of peace with God, and a stranger to the believer's joy and triumph; thou mayst indeed rejoice, but it is a joy which is worldly, sinful, and of short duration; yea, according to the language of Solomon, *“In such laughter the heart is sorrowful;”* for when thy joy is at its height, a few reflections on death and eternity will spoil all thy pleasure, and banish all thy mirth; but the Christian's joy in God continues in the most distressing circumstances of life; and even when death itself looks him full in the face, he often experiences it in the highest degree. Moreover, consider what is the MATTER of thy TRIUMPH; it is nothing more nor better than the world affords; thou gloriest in riches and honours, in gifts and attainments; but to *glory in the Lord, to rejoice in tribulations, and to exult in the hope of glory,* are things of which thou art wholly ignorant. O sinner! would to God that thine eyes were opened to see thyself, and that thou wert deeply impressed with a sense of thine awful state, whilst thou art an enemy to thy God. It is however thy happiness that even now, whilst thou art a rebel against thy righteous sovereign, thou hast offers of peace made unto thee: the God of heaven declares in his word, that he will make peace with thee, if thou art but willing to make peace with him: lay then

down the weapons of thine opposition; bring thy heart, with all its enmity, before God, by prayer and supplication, that he himself would humble it; seek peace through the blood of Christ alone; that will produce real joy. Believe it, that the joys which the world presents are vain and transitory, but those of which the believer tastes, are substantial and durable; yes, even the tears which he sheds in secret before God, for his sins, are accompanied with more gladness than THOU hast ever experienced in the enjoyment of all that the world could give. Pray then, with David, “*Remember me Lord, with the favour that thou bearest unto thy people, that I may REJOICE in the gladness of thy nation; that I may GLORY with thine inheritance,*” Pf. cvi. 4, 5.

But, secondly, we have a word to address to God’s people, for their encouragement and direction.

Here, perhaps, the DISHEARTENED and DISTRESSED Christian may be alarmed and say, “When I examine myself with respect to the lowest degrees of faith, as hungering, thirsting, desiring and looking, I dare not but confess that I have experienced these; but when I am told what fruits are produced by faith, I am led to suspect its reality; for had I true faith, I might expect, sometimes at least, to experience some of those fruits.” But we ask you,

1. Dost thou not esteem those truly BLESSED, who are permitted to ENJOY FRIENDSHIP with God, and to experience joys divine? Hast thou not often desired that thou mightest experience the same? Whence proceed those desires, but from having been *taught of the Lord*, how truly precious those blessings are?

2. Is there any thing in the world which can give thee any substantial JOY or SATISFACTION? Dost thou not account all things as *lofs and dung*, when compared with the comfort of which thy soul partakes, in those delightful moments, when thou hast communion with thy God? Wouldst thou hesitate whether thou wouldst exchange thine hope, small as it may be, of having God for thy portion, for all that this earth can afford? Is not God more precious to thee than a thousand worlds?

3. Hast thou ever GLORIED in thyself, and dost thou boast in the presence of God, of thy virtues or performances? Say, is it not rather *in the Lord* that thou *gloriest*? And dost thou not triumph in the righteousness of the divine Redeemer alone? Has not the ETERNAL taught thee to renounce thine own righteousness, thine own wisdom, thine own strength? Does it not cover thee with shame, when thou gloriest in any thing which thou mayest have done? Art thou not compelled to acknowledge, that thou art but sinful *dust and ashes*, a creature unworthy, and abominable in the sight of God?

4. Art thou not firmly determined to CLEAVE to the Lord, even though he afford thee no comfort; but cause thee to walk in a DARK and gloomy way? Were the Lord Jesus to put to thee the question which he once proposed to his disciples, "*Wilt thou also go away?*" wouldst thou not with Peter, reply, "*Lord, to whom shall I go but unto thee, thou hast the words of eternal life?*" Whatever thy case may be, or however the Lord may see fit to deal with thee, art thou not ready to testify that thou wouldst rather die at the feet of Jesus, than live in sin, and after the manner of the world? Now, is not all this an evidence that the desires of thy soul have God in Christ

for their object, and that to thee, *his favour is life, and his loving kindness better than life?*

5. Although thou complaineſt of never having experienced the fruits of faith in a high degree, wouldſt thou dare to aſſert that thou haſt not at all felt its peace, joy and triumph? Canſt thou not recollect the moments when thou couldſt diſtinguiſh whether God was at a diſtance, or near to thy ſoul, with his light and influences? When in ſecret thou didſt WRESTLE with God in prayers, and with tears; when thy ſoul went out towards him with ſuch ardent affections, that all which the world could proffer appeared but little in thine eyes, didſt thou not then feel thy heart ſweetly ſerene? Did not thoſe very tears thou didſt ſhed, when confeſſing thy ſins before the Lord, when thy heart burned with affection to God, produce more real joy than ever thou exerciſedſt with regard to any terreſtrial objects; yea, did not the joy which the world once afforded, vaniſh and ceaſe to be joy to thee? and when God has called thee to SEVERE trials, under which thou kneweſt not how to ſupport thyſelf, haſt thou not been enabled to TRIUMPH in the ſtrength of thy Redeemer God? Has not that *ſtrength been perfected in thy weakneſs*, ſo that thou couldſt proceed on thy way in the might of Jehovah? Haſt thou never taſted any of the FIRST FRUITS of heaven, in the exerciſe of a ſupreme, undivided, and ſincere love to God, and the Lord Chriſt? Moreover, wouldſt thou not delight to IMITATE the inhabitants of heaven, in a holy walk, and with a mind ſet upon objects above? Say, haſt thou experienced all theſe things? then, though thou mayeſt not feel this peace, joy and triumph, as has been deſcribed, yet be aſſured, the principle of faith is in thine heart. It is not

for thee to prescribe to the ETERNAL, what degree of grace he must impart to thee; remember that he is a sovereign; that his wisdom knows of what things thou hast need; and that in the time when thou dost absolutely require more grace, it will not then be withheld from thee, but a rich supply be granted. Despise not the day of small things, but be thankful for the least favour he bestows upon thee: esteem living by faith to be thy greatest privilege: cleave to the Lord, and wait upon the God of thy salvation, with a composed confidence, to the very last hour of thy life; perhaps thy last moments may be *“the times of refreshing from the Lord.”* O! how often has it occurred, that the people of God have passed all their days complaining of darkness and distress; but when they have come to a dying bed, have received from their heavenly Father such tokens of his love, as have enraptured their whole souls, and overwhelmed them with joys celestial and unspeakable! Thus they have been enabled to triumph over death, saying, with David, *“Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou (Lord) art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me,”* Ps. xxiii.

But there are others of God's children who have once walked in the light, but now complain that they are WALKING IN DARKNESS; that the comforter, who once administered consolation to their souls, is departed from them; they lament, with Job, *“We go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but we cannot perceive him,”* Chap. xxiii. 8. What renders such a state the more insupportable is, that the persons who are thus situated, have once experienced the delights of being nigh unto God.

You must consider, Christian friends, that it is

no uncommon thing for God to change his mode of dealing with his people: it would be an extraordinary circumstance were you always to walk in the light; the sun is often obscured by the intervening cloud; and there are substantial reasons, both on GOD'S PART and ON YOUR OWN, for his peculiar dealings with you:.

1. God will, by such dealings, teach you to maintain CONFIDENCE in an hour of darkness; to depend upon his promises, and to live upon former experiences. We cannot form a full and perfect idea of what it is to trust in the Lord, unless we are led in ways impenetrably dark.

2. God will, by such dispensations, TRY YOUR FAITH, your LOVE, your PATIENCE and CONSTANCY. It is an easy matter to continue in the ways of godliness, and to cleave to the Lord, when he is nigh unto us, and, faith's eye behold the sun of righteousness; but it requires faith *strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might*, to make the soul cry out with Job, "*Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.*" Beloved, no one can express with what readiness the Lord hearkens to those bold notes of his moaning dove, *in the clefts of the rock, and in the secret places of the stairs.*

3. God makes you to feel at times, the *horror of great darkness*, that you may KNOW SOMETHING by experience, OF THAT DISTRESS which filled the soul of the blessed Jesus, who, after having constantly walked in the light of his Father's countenance, endured such hidings of his face as made him cry out, "*My God! my God; why hast thou forsaken me?*" to the end that you may be excited to love your Redeemer with warmer affection; and also, that in this respect you may become conformable to his image.

4. The Lord designs, by these dark dispensations of his providence, to KEEP YOU HUMBLE, and to prevent you from being lifted up in your imaginations, on account of the grace you may have received. The nicest pencil cannot paint the pride of the human heart, especially when it conceives that it is in possession of a jewel of which others are destitute; but God will teach us, by his dealings with us, that all we enjoy, flows to us through the channel of free grace.

5. God designs, by leading his people in such dark ways, to TEACH them to PRIZE, in a higher degree, and to endeavour more carefully to PRESERVE the gracious experiences of his loving kindness, whenever he may be pleased to restore them: we never place so great a value on a thing, as when having once enjoyed it, we are again deprived of it.

But whilst God has on his part so many wise reasons for dealing thus with his people, the greatest, perhaps, arise from themselves: are they not brought into such dark ways, because they do not make a suitable improvement of the grace they have received, by a humble and circumspect walk, and a diligent discharge of duty? Those who have once tasted that the Lord is gracious, are laid under many obligations: much having been given them, of them much is required; much prudence, much care to preserve a holy peace of mind; much weanedness and abstraction from the world. Now, if you have been very deficient in these duties, you need not think it strange, if God manifests his displeasure against your remissness, by leaving you for a season enveloped in darkness. And are you conscious to yourselves, that you have given him much reason to deal thus with you? take the following directions:

1. Be not overmuch DEJECTED on account of your failure in duty; but humble yourselves before God, and fly to the atoning blood of Christ for pardon.

2. CONFESS before God, that it is he alone who giveth *power to the faint, and to those who have no might, increaseth strength*; and that therefore, *without him ye can do nothing*; and must faint, if left by him to go without the sun. Profess to him that ye can find no peace nor satisfaction in the creature apart from him, and that ye desire him, and him alone, as the portion of your souls.

3. Give YOURSELVES anew to the Lord in the EXERCISE of a lively faith; cast yourselves afresh into the arms of your compassionate Redeemer, and covenant God, and renew your covenant with him.

4. *Persevere* in praying after the manner of David, Ps. li. 12, “*Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with thy free spirit; make me to hear joy and gladness, that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice.*” The Lord is a compassionate God; “*he will not always chide, neither will he keep his anger for ever. Though in a little wrath he may hide his face from you for a moment, yet with everlasting loving kindness will he have mercy on you.*”

5. And when the Lord shall again reveal himself to your souls, FOLLOW the example of the spouse, who, when she had found her beloved, *would not let him go*. In like manner, cleave to your Jesus, by faith; ply him with tears and supplication, and honour him by a walk worthy of the grace you may have received: if God ever again *speaks peace* to your souls, be careful not to return *again to folly*.

But we have yet a word to you, believers, WHO ARE ESTABLISHED in the faith, and who EXPERIENCE its peace, its joy and triumph.

How great is your happiness ! how glorious your privileges ? Ye, not only in common with your fellow-Christians, have grace, but strong evidences that ye are the subjects of it. Ye are not only at peace with God, but ye hold sweet converse with him, as your bosom friend ; ye not only believe, but what is more, *ye taste that the Lord is gracious*. Ye have begun already to enjoy heaven, even whilst ye are sojourning on earth.

But still you are to keep in mind,

1. That to be led in this agreeable manner ; to go thus on your way rejoicing, is not your DAILY BREAD. These exercises are generally not of long duration. God may soon change the ways he has been holding with you : his people do not always bask beneath the rays of the sun of prosperity. David and other saints, in their own experience, have been witnesses of the truth we now advance. Therefore, believers, enjoy your *good things*, now, when no intervening cloud intercepts your believing views of your Redeemer ; but, *in the day of adversity*, consider that it is no strange or unusual thing with God, to divest his people, at least for a season, of that peace, of those joys, and triumphs which you have experienced.

2. Endeavour to EXCITE and to keep alive those delightful and comfortable frames, by the exercise of an habitual and friendly intercourse with God, especially in secret ; by counselling with him ; by confiding in him ; and, above all, by constantly making application to the Lord Jesus.— O, Christians, run to this tree of life ; for here only can you pluck those heavenly fruits.

3. CONDUCT yourselves with PRUDENCE ; make a proper use of those peculiar blessings with which you are favoured ; pursue your journey heaven-

ward, and evidence to the world, by a tender and holy walk in the fear of the Lord, that ye are indeed travelling thither. Are your privileges great? your obligations are also great. Be then on your guard against carelessness, lukewarmness, and sloth: consider that Satan is never more engaged to entangle you in sin, than when ye have much of the divine presence. Ye are therefore never more loudly called to watchfulness, than at such a season.— Watch against the very first temptations to remissness in the discharge of duty. Peace and holiness must always go hand in hand.

4. Let your TONGUES frequently CELEBRATE the praises of your God. Does he give you assurances of his having *brought you out of darkness into his marvellous light*? study to display the honour of his name. Have ye the best reasons to believe that ye are interested in the inheritance of the saints in light? *give glory to God the Father, who hath made you meet to be partakers of this inheritance*, and sing with the church, “*I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the robe of righteousness,*” Isaiah lxi. 10. and with David, “*I will sing unto the Lord, because he hath dealt bountifully with me,*” Psal. xiii. 6. Let the praises of God be ever on your tongues and in your hearts.

5. Show to the world, THAT TO SERVE GOD IN CHRIST, IS ALWAYS PRODUCTIVE OF REAL JOY. Do you experience the joys of God’s salvation internally? manifest it in your external conduct; and thus remove the prejudices which the world conceives against the divine religion of Christ, “that it makes its votaries pass their days in gloomy melancholy:” on the contrary, let it appear by your words and actions, “that no joys are to be compared with those

“ which result from the service of God ;” that, by these means, *unhappy infidels* may be allured, and constrained to say, “ we will go with you, for we “ have heard that the Lord is with you.”

6. Is a joyful glorying in God, in tribulations, and in the hope of glory, a fruit of faith ? evidence that ye are elevated to this exalted state, by not seeking the things which are on earth, and by setting your affections on those *which are above* : by faith, keep heaven constantly in your view, till you obtain the end of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

And, Christians, is it so delightful here to have a prelibation of the blessings of the promised land ? Are the first fruits so grateful to the soul ? O ! what will be the full fruition ! Can the joy which ye here experience in God, and which is so frequently interrupted, animate you to meet with courage every opposition, and afford you so much comfort ? what will be your consolations, when ye shall possess that fulness of joy which is *in the presence of God*, and *drink of those pleasures* which are *at his right hand for evermore*, when everlasting joy shall be upon your head, and all sorrow and sighing shall flee away ! Can you now triumph in the glorious state to which you are raised, how poor or despised soever you may be in the world ? in what will you not triumph, when ye shall enter into the palace of the King, and *sit with Christ upon his throne*, having obtained the end of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

AMEN AND AMEN.

THE

PIOUS COMMUNICANT.

Lecture VII.

ON THE BACKSLIDINGS AND DECLENSIONS
OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD, IN THE
EXERCISE OF THE DIVINE LIFE.



HAVING, in the preceding lectures, exhibited the exercises of believers, and the blessed fruits which proceed from faith, we conceive it not to be improper, but highly expedient, in the present declining state of religion, to shew, “ that a real child of God, “ who once had made great advances in the divine “ life, and lived near to God, may fall, and so much “ decline in grace, that the lustre with which he once “ shone, and which rendered him an ornament to “ his profession, may become greatly obscured, and “ disappear.” The end which we propose, in treating on this subject, is, both the recovery of such as may have gone back in religion; the quickening of those who are making no progress in it, to be on the watch, lest they recede farther from God; and the preservation of those who are truly walking with God, by setting them on their guard against the danger of falling into a state of declension.

In order to treat the subject before us with perspicuity, we shall shew,

I. That believers are liable to DECLINE in the ways of religion; and that this is a case which often OCCURS.

II. In what it CONSISTS, and how it discovers itself.

III. The CAUSES and steps which lead to it.

IV. The MEANS of recovery from this unhappy state; and,

V. The uses which each of us ought to make of this subject.

First, then, we are to shew, that believers are liable to DECLINE in religion; and that this is a case which often OCCURS.

1. The word of God teaches us this in a variety of places: thus, the spouse in the Canticles, is represented as suffering *her beloved to knock* without admittance, whilst she indulged herself in sloth and ease, saying, “*I have put off my coat, how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet, how shall I defile them?*” Cant. v. 3. Whilst the bridegroom tarried, the WISE as well as the foolish virgins had fallen asleep, Matt. xxv. 5. The church of Ephesus is charged with having *lost her first love*, Rev. ii. 4. The converted Jews in the last days, are introduced as complaining, “*Lord, why hast thou made us to err from thy ways, and hardened our hearts from thy fear?*” Isai. lxiii. 17. The *precious sons of Zion*, comparable to *fine gold*, are esteemed as *earthen pitchers*, Lam. iv. 2. And the Lord, to make his people reflect with shame on their backslidings, tells them, Jer. ii. 2, “*I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness.*”

2. It was to guard the people of God against declension in religion, that all those pointed EXHORTATIONS and faithful warnings are given by Christ and his apostles. How often does the Lord Jesus cry out, *Watch!* and the apostles, after his example, did the same. Paul, writing to the Corinthians, addresses them thus: "*Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men; be strong,*" 1 Cor. xvi. 13. And again, 2 Cor. vi. 1, "*We beseech you also, that ye receive not the grace of God in vain.*" Writing to the Romans, he exhorts them, *not to be conformed to this world*; and to the Hebrews, he adds, "*Looking diligently, lest any man fail of the grace of God,*" Heb. xii. 15. Now all these excitations and admonitions would have been to no purpose, if the people of God might not, through the remains of indwelling sin, fall into a state of declension.

3. The EXAMPLES of the most eminent saints mentioned in scripture, CONFIRM this truth. DAVID, a man after God's own heart, not only fell into the sins of murder and adultery, but he remained unaffected with his guilt, till Nathan, with a message from God, pointedly told him, "*Thou art the man,*" 2 Sam. 12. And SOLOMON, whom the Lord loved, went so far astray, that he offered religious worship to *Ashtoreth, the goddess of the Zidonians, and Milcom, the abomination of the Ammonites,* 1 Kings, xi. 4, 5. The experience of every day gives us but too much reason to say to many, as Paul to the Galatians, "*Ye did run well, who hath hindered you?*" Of too many, alas! it may be said, as of Demas; "*Demas hath forsaken us, having loved this present world.*" The truth of what has been said above will more fully appear, when we come to the second

head, "To shew more particularly, in what backsliding, or declension in religion, consists.

But, before we proceed to this, it must be remarked, "That as all is not grace that is taken for it, so all is not to be viewed as backsliding that men may esteem such." We assert,

1. That ALL is not GRACE which is taken for it. It is often found, that persons, by means of a pious education, or by a faithful representation of divine truths to their minds, by the common illuminations of the Holy Ghost, may go so far as externally to escape the pollutions of the world; to associate with believers. and apparently have a desire to walk in the way of life. It is indeed hard to tell to what lengths they may go, under the influence of an awakened conscience; but though they appear to *begin with the Spirit*, yet, because their hearts have never been purified from the love of sin, they *end in the flesh*. Now, when men of this description return to the world, and engage again in its pleasures and amusements, this is no backsliding; for they never were partakers of true grace; all their religious exercises were but external; their hearts were never changed; their wills were never made subservient to God; and therefore they did not persevere to the end; they were *branches which did not bear fruit* in Christ, the living vine; and hence are *taken away*.

2. It is also a truth, that all that which may be considered by believers themselves as backsliding, or declension in grace, is not in reality such. When persons, especially those who had been greatly under the dominion of sin, and lived much after the course of this world, have been, by the power of divine grace, brought home to God, the change is often so great, that they IMMEDIATELY break asunder all

the bonds of iniquity, and bid a final adieu to sin, to the world, and to all that formerly had been the objects of their delight, and come out boldly for God and his service: such persons the Lord often treats with much tenderness; their hearts are, at their first conversion, filled with love to God and Christ; and they are filled with great delight, from a conviction that they are loved by the Eternal, with the affection of the most tender parent; but they have yet a lesson to learn, which often proves very painful to them; that is, "to discover how much corruption still remains within them." Now, when they are led to see how *desperately wicked and deceitful their hearts* are, and when God, to teach them the knowledge of themselves, is pleased to withhold the light of his countenance; when the summer, with all its charms, is changed into the gloom and dreariness of winter, and God permits the enemy to rage, and their corruptions, which appeared to be subdued, again to arise and damp their courage and their zeal; in such a case they begin to think they have certainly backslidden; but this may be an erroneous conclusion; the very reverse may be the truth; for, to be made to see ourselves in our true character; to be humbled before God, and yet to cleave to him; to be, in a word, in a state of darkness, and still to *stay upon* God, is grace in a higher degree than that which is exercised by one who walks in the light of God's countenance; but believers may not see this, and therefore are filled with the apprehension, that they have gone back in religion; but,

3. We remark once more, that the backslidings of God's people are to be considered as taking place in a twofold respect: First, they may, unawares, fall into sin, at a time when they have been off their

guard; but then they do not continue in this condition: as soon as they see their danger, they are presently awakened, and return with shame to the Lord. In this case it is not an universal falling away from the spiritual life, but a partial one, in regard to some of its acts: thus it was with King Hezekiah; *his heart was indeed lifted up*, but he afterwards humbled himself for his pride, 2 Chron. xxxii. 26. This, too, was the case with Peter; he denied his Lord and Master; but Jesus no sooner *looked* upon him, than he *went out and wept bitterly*, Luke xxii. and was, after that, far more active and zealous in the cause of Christ. Or, secondly, believers may decline with respect to ALL the parts of the spiritual life; that is, an universal weakness may obtain; they may long continue greatly abated in their zeal for the Redeemer's interests. The first is, indeed, a falling into sin; but is not properly what we mean by backsliding; because the soul which has thus fallen is instantaneously enabled to rise again; but the latter is that declension in religion which we have more immediately in our eye.

In what it consists, was in the SECOND place to be shewn; and in order to do this, we propose to make it appear, that the children of God may decline, as it respects their KNOWLEDGE, the principal ACTS of the spiritual life, their holiness, and the TENDERNESS of their walk, both with regard to the mortification of sin, and the practice of piety; and, lastly, the comfortable and delightful experience of the love of God.

1. We observe, that a believer may decline, as to his KNOWLEDGE of divine truths. The soul, when it is first visited by God's grace, makes rapid progress in knowledge; a small portion of time then

produces to the believer, higher attainments in knowledge than other Christians, who have been longer on the way, usually do in months, or even years; for when first the spirit produces faith in the heart, the believer embraces every opportunity, and improves every mean of acquiring the knowledge of divine things: no difficulty is too great, no pains are too severe; neither worldly business, nor regard to health, will prevent him from seeking to become more acquainted with God and the divine Redeemer: in this he finds so much comfort, so much delight, that with Jeremiah he exclaims, "*O Lord, thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart,*" Jer. xv. 16. Hence proceeds a sincere and cordial love to the truth, as it is in Jesus, as well as a desire to advance in the knowledge of it. But notwithstanding all this, there may be a declension in knowledge; and this is ever the case,

A. When men become REMISS in self-examination; when a small obstruction in their way is sufficient to make them discontinue the research; when, seeing the difficulty of acquiring this knowledge, they quit the pursuit; no longer strive to *go on* towards *perfection*, and instead of making such progress that they might be *teachers*, they still continue *babes that have need of milk*.

B. When, through this sluggish temper, they begin to entertain the idea, that KNOWLEDGE is not so NECESSARY as they at first supposed, and SPEAK slightly of the acquirements of others; or when, seeing that many have improved in speculative knowledge, who have been destitute of grace, they resolve to give themselves no farther trouble in adding to their stock of divine information.

2. Believers may decline, in respect to the principal EXERCISES of the spiritual life ; as will be seen in the following particulars :

A. In their COMMUNION with God IN SECRET. Believers, at all times, hold an intimate communication with heaven ; they go with *boldness to the Throne of Grace*, and cast all their concerns into their Redeemer's bosom ; they walk with God as with their friend, and cannot bear that any thing should intervene to disturb their spiritual intercourse, or deprive them of their close fellowship which they hold with their covenant God ; and when any circumstance occurs to set them at a distance from him, they are not at rest until it is removed : as two persons, who live in the habits of the most intimate and sincere friendship, cannot endure the thought that any coolness should take place between them, so it is insupportable to believers, when they cannot, with their wonted freedom, approach unto God, and hold sweet fellowship with their glorious Mediator ; but having backslidden, it is now otherwise with them : in secret, they lift up their sluggish hands, whilst their hearts, lifeless, and full of wandering thoughts, are but little impressed, either with a sense of the majesty of God, or their own necessities. In such a frame of mind, the believer cannot set himself down to meditate profitably upon God, or divine things. When he thinks upon the Eternal, his mind is disquieted and filled with fear ; so that he is ready to say with Asaph, “ *I remembered God and was troubled ; I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed.*” If he sets himself about the duty of secret prayer, he wants animation ; it is with difficulty that he can raise his heart to God, much less can he wrestle with him ; the Throne of Grace seems hid from him, and the

Lord appears as if he had withdrawn himself from his soul ; yet with all this he is not suitably affected ; he appears now, no longer anxious to keep up his former intercourse with heaven ; he is set at a great distance from God, and scarcely longer knows what communion with him is ; he goes to him ; but it is as to a stranger ; his heart is straitened, his lips are closed, he knows not what to utter. Of such the Lord may well complain, as of his people of old, “ *They have forgotten me days without number.*”

B. The children of God may also backslide or decline, with respect to the EXERCISE of FAITH in the Lord Jesus. O ! how much were they taken up with Christ in the time of their first love ; how precious was he then to their souls ! *They counted all things but loss for Christ* ; their desires flowed out incessantly towards him, and to him they fled for refuge. With what confidence and affection did they commit themselves to his arms, and cast upon him all their burdens ! Without him they felt most sensibly that they could do nothing ; but that through his strength, they could perform all things. It is not now, however, thus with them ; their faith is no more in its wonted lively exercise ; they see not that preciousness in Christ, and their need of constant dependence upon him, which once they saw ; they become proud, and lean upon their own strength ; they seem to think that Jesus is not now so necessary for them as they once supposed him to be ; they, indeed, engage in *working out their own salvation*, but not as they did before, relying wholly upon this, that it is God that must *work in them, both to will and to do of his good pleasure* ; their faith has become so weakened, and they themselves so much like *bruised reeds*, constantly wavering, through unbelief, that they can

hardly tell on what footing they stand : and what is still more lamentable, they have in a great measure lost their sensibility, and have become dull and heavy, as was the case with the spouse, who, laying on a bed of sloth, refused admittance to him whom she once owned as the beloved of her soul ; they must therefore expect like her, to meet with his displeasure, and to find that he will withdraw himself, and, for the present at least, retire.

C. There may also be a declension or backsliding, with respect to the entertainment given to the HOLY GHOST, and his OPERATIONS. Believers may *grieve*, and *quench the Spirit* ; that is to say, they may conduct themselves towards him in such a manner, that if it were possible for him to experience grief, he would be grieved ; or the Holy Spirit may deport himself towards them as a person who is grieved, and withhold his comforting influences ; but here the question arises, “ When may the children of God be said to quench the Holy Ghost ? ” They do this,

a. When they do not FOLLOW where he leads, ATTEND to his counsels, and LISTEN to his awakening admonitions. Are the people of God excited to separate themselves for secret prayer, and to engage in the act of renewing their covenant with God ? all this is of the Spirit. Now, when the line of conduct to which he urges them, is not pursued ; when they feel an aversion to the duties to which he calls them, and are diverted from them by the things of the world ; then is the Holy Spirit grieved : or,

b. When the Spirit WARNS them OF SIN, and ADMONISHES them to DUTY, saying, “ *This is the way, walk ye in it,* ” and they are INATTENTIVE to the admonition ; or when, by venturing UNNE-

CESSARILY into the way of temptation, they are hurried into sin : thus to demean themselves towards the Holy Ghost is grievous to him, as it is not acting agreeably to the light which he has given them.

c. In a word, the people of God quench the Holy Ghost, when his comforting INFLUENCES do not meet with a suitable ENTERTAINMENT ; when they, who are the subject of them, instead of being HUMBLE and WATCHFUL, become PROUD and CARELESS. The Holy Spirit being thus grieved, withholds his quickening grace, and leaves his people, in a measure, to themselves. His operations, now, are designed for their restoration ; by writing bitter things against them, he would alarm them, and let them see how *evil and bitter a thing it is to sin against God* ; for when men depart from the Lord, they are seldom recovered without great distress of soul ; as in the case of Peter, whose grievous fall cost him much sorrow and many tears.

D. When the children of God have thus backslidden from him, there always follows a relaxation and abatement of mutual love. GOD, on his part, does not, as formerly, manifest his loving kindness to the souls of his people ; when they draw near to him in prayer, he covers himself as with a cloud ; he shuts out their prayers ; he is deaf to their cries, and returns no answers to their petitions. And so, on the part of HIS PEOPLE themselves, there is a decrease of affection : their hearts were once inflamed with a love to the Lord Jesus, which was *stronger than death*, and with a *jealousy as cruel as the grave*, the coals of which were coals of fire, which many waters could not quench ; constrained by this love, they could do any thing for Christ, and were willing to suffer the utmost severities for his sake : in the exer-

cise of this love they gave themselves unreservedly to him; and, influenced by it, they endeavoured to bring others also to the Saviour; but, by backsliding, they have lost their first love; their desires after Christ are become faint and few, and they are almost indifferent about communion with him. This coldness of affection damps their zeal, stops their mouths, and makes them daftardly in their master's cause. And, as might be expected, their Jesus does not conduct himself, on his part, towards them as he did, previous to their declension: he does not display the fulness of his love to their souls; though it be true, that *whom he once loves, he loves to the end*, yet he withholds from such backsliding believers the delightful manifestations of it. That face in which they once saw so many charms, Jesus now hides from their souls; for they have slighted his love: it was thus the Lord dealt with the spouse, as appears from her complaint, Song v. 4, "*My beloved has withdrawn himself; he put in his hand by the hole of the door, and my bowels were moved for him.*"

E. The children of God may decline, with respect to their LIVELY HOPES of heaven and eternal salvation. Through the weakness of their faith and love, their hopes are shaken; their souls are full of doubts, whether ever they shall arrive at the haven of everlasting felicity: hence, when they meditate on death and eternity, a dread seizes them, not knowing what may be their portion in a future world: they are also but little exercised about heaven; their faith does not as formerly, represent as visible, the things of the invisible world; for, by not being set upon having inward fellowship with God, the desires which they once had of enjoying God face to face, in glory, have more or less ceased to exist. They seem, in a

word, both to act and live, as if they were to *live here always*, and as if heaven had gotten both out of their eye, and out of their heart.

3. But as the redeemed may decline in knowledge, in the principal acts of the spiritual life, and in secret fellowship with God ; so there may be a declension in HOLINESS, and in humble WALKING WITH GOD, both as it respects the MORTIFICATION of sin, and the PRACTICE of piety and religion.

A. With respect to the MORTIFICATION of sin. In the time of the Christian's first love, he is on his guard, and sets a watch over his heart, lest he be overtaken by iniquity ; he sets a seal upon his mouth, and keeps the *doors of his lips* ; and on the least appearance of evil, he is smitten to his inmost soul, and enjoys no rest till he has found peace again with his heavenly father, through Jesus Christ ; but the Christian, who has backslidden, has lost this tenderness of conscience ; sin sits too easy upon him ; he is seldom disturbed on account of it. All this is clearly evinced in the life of David : when he was borne down with the heavy pressure of affliction, and lived near to the Lord, his heart smote him for cutting off the skirt of Saul's garment ; but afterwards, when he was advanced to the throne ; he continued, for months, insensible of the sins of murder and adultery, of which he had been guilty, 2 Sam. xi. What was once an insupportable burden, he can now easily sustain ; and his opposition to sin is become now so feeble, that Satan, his subtil foe, finds it no difficult matter to entice him from one sin to another ; for,

a. In proportion as love to God decreases, an AFFECTION to the world succeeds ; for the mind of man, being an active principle, will always be em-

ployed either about good or evil ; if it be not entertained with the contemplation of things spiritual, and within the vail, it will delight itself in carnal and visible objects, in which it never could, nor ever will find satisfaction.

b. As grace declines, PRIVATE duties are neglected: the Christian, seduced by company, can, without remorse, pass whole days and nights conversing on subjects, which, if not sinful in their nature, are, at least, not edifying ; inasmuch, that natural men, observing this, are immediately led to enquire, “ In what do these professed Christians differ from us ? ”

c. By giving way to the sinful customs and manners of worldly men, the Christian becomes again too conformed to that world, which he had for ever renounced ; he suffers this deceitful DELILAH to draw him sometimes so far astray, as to leave but little ground to think he has any acquaintance with the path of true piety ; and, what is still more lamentable, he may indulge himself in the works of the flesh, and thus prove a stumbling-block to the world, dishonour God, grieve the hearts of the pious, and wound his own soul. An instance of this occurs in the life of David, in the matter of Uriah ; on which occasion, God, by his prophet, told him, “ By this deed, *thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme,*” 2 Sam. xii. 14.

B. As those who backslide, yield to the commission of sin, so they are remiss in the EXERCISE of the graces which adorn the Christian, and the practice of those duties which the holy religion of Christ demands ; for,

a. They become *inattentive* to the duties of hearing, reading, and searching the word ; through coldness of affection, they suffer a small matter to

divert them from an employment, in which they once took great delight, and on which their spiritual life, in a great measure, depended.

b. They are *remiss* in the duty of prayer; this they once esteemed a great privilege; in this they once found much pleasure; but now, prayer has become a thing of course, a mere formal exercise: there is still, however, too much light in the soul, and too deep an impression of the omniscience and omnipresence of God, upon the heart, to suffer them altogether to quit the practice; but when they pray, it is more from custom, or to quiet conscience, than from any satisfaction they find in the duty; and it is well if they do not sometimes feel a secret pleasure in being hindered from engaging in it, and rejoice when the work is done.

c. They endeavour to *avoid* the company of the godly; for, being in this unhappy state, they are strangers to themselves, and, therefore, afraid to converse with exercised Christians, and avoid opening their minds to them on spiritual subjects.

d. The seeds of grace, however, remaining in their hearts, they are sometimes brought to see how low they have fallen, and to be in some measure affected with the sight. But how do they improve the conviction? instead of duly reflecting on their present state, and following the light afforded them, a view of their wretched condition makes them *sink* into discouragement.

They are discouraged, in the FIRST place, with respect to GOD. They dare not entertain a hope of being restored; the separation between God and them appears so great, that they conclude he will never receive them again in mercy; but, for their unfaithfulness, will exclude them, in his wrath, for

ever from his favour. They are discouraged, likewise, on account of the number, and the power of their spiritual ENEMIES. They think they can never make a successful stand against them; but must one day perish by their hands, and ultimately yield to them the victory; and, lastly, they are disheartened, on account of THEMSELVES: O, say they, “We
“ are plunged into the unfathomable gulph of misery; the separation between the Lord and us is so
“ great, that we are unable to discern what method
“ to take, or what to do to be restored to our former
“ condition.” Hence they become disheartened; their hands hang down, and they neglect the means which might tend to their recovery.

4. From all this, it must follow, as a necessary consequence, that Christians may decline, with respect to the COMFORTS and JOYS which they formerly experienced. God, who is a holy being, and cannot endure sin in his people, manifests his displeasure by withholding from them the light of his countenance, and *writing bitter things against them*: the Lord Jesus does not give them any tokens of his love; hence, they must go on their way in darkness and in sorrow.

See, thus, the deplorable condition into which the children of God may be permitted to come! and in this state they would ever remain, if the arm of the Almighty were not put forth for their recovery.

Let us now proceed to the THIRD thing proposed, which was, to shew the CAUSES of declension in the children of God, and point out the several STEPS which lead to it.

First; the CAUSES of declension in religion are many; some on the part of God, and others on the part of the backslider.

1. God, in permitting his people to backslide, ACTS according to his ABSOLUTE sovereignty; he is not accountable for his actions; all his doings display his majesty and glory: but if we consider, at the same time, God as infinitely wise, we shall be sensible, that he cannot do any thing without reasons, which bear the stamp of wisdom; and such reasons he doubtless has for permitting his people to fall into a backsliding state; some of which may be the following:

A. To manifest his almighty and divine POWER, in preserving grace alive in the heart, in the midst of so great a declension, and thus to display the prevalence of Christ's intercession, whilst he prays for his people, that their *faith fail not*, Luke xxii. 32.

B. To exhibit his FAITHFULNESS, and the IMMUTABILITY of his covenant, notwithstanding the UNFAITHFULNESS of his people; for, be their declension ever so great, *with the Lord there is an appointed time*, in which he will appear *to raise again their souls that have been bowed down; to fulfil their desires, and to save them.*

C. To WARN others against falling into such a state; to PUT them on their guard against whatever may lead to it; and to EXCITE them to a tender walk and conversation: but, especially,

2. We must look for the causes of declension IN BELIEVERS THEMSELVES; for God is not *a wilderness*, or a *land of darkness to Israel*, Jer. ii. 31. The causes of their declension are in themselves, and they are such as these: either,

A. Some AGGRAVATED SIN or SINS, into which they have fallen, and of which they have never repented; and for which they have never ob-

tained pardon through the blood of Christ. It is a truth, founded on the experience of ages, that one sin indulged, usually makes way for another: this was the case with David; after his adultery with Bathsheba, followed the murder of Uriah.

B. Because they have not been DAILY ENGAGED IN HOLDING INTERCOURSE WITH GOD, as a God in covenant; and in LIVING as it becomes persons standing in such a relation to him; they live too much upon the evidences which they may have received of God's love. When these are not discerned, their fears arise; their souls are disquieted; discouragement taking place, remissness, or a neglect of duty, follows. It is the fault of many, that on their first convictions, and conversion to God, they do not immediately covenant with him in a more explicit and solemn manner: this would lay a foundation for stability in a time of darkness. They would not be so soon disheartened, nor so easily hurried into sin. A recollection of their covenant relation to God, would make either the one or the other of these appear unworthy of them.

C. Because believers have not made suitable RETURNS to the Lord for his goodness and love; but have been cool and indifferent towards him, and not sufficiently prized God's manifestation of his presence to their souls; for when he knocked at the door of their hearts, they opened not immediately to him, saying, "*Come in, thou blessed of the Lord, why standest thou without?*" our hearts are ready to "give thee a welcome reception." O believers! remember it, when the Lord comes to your souls, he will be regarded and made welcome by you; he will suffer no rival; his presence must be so high in your esteem, as to eclipse the beauty, and sink the value

of every earthly object; otherwise, you may expect to be taught the worth of his visits by the withdrawing of them.

D. When God has caused his people to rejoice; if they have not been careful to PRESERVE the blessing, by a holy walk and fresh surrender of themselves to him; if, when this joy has been interrupted, they have not been diligent in searching out the cause, and seeking its restoration; or, if they have looked for comfort from some other quarter: all these are so many reasons why the Lord may suffer them to feel that unhappiness which declension in religion always brings in its train.

E. Another cause of declension in religion is, a YIELDING too much to a SLOTHFUL TEMPER, or too great an INDULGENCE in indolence and inactivity. When religion is alive in the soul, we think it not too much to infringe upon the hours appointed to rest, and to employ them in religious exercises, whilst the morning and evening of every day witness our secret intercourse with our God; but when we become inactive, and indulge ourselves on the lap of ease; when the service of God becomes a burden, and duty is neglected; then leanness and deadness enter into the soul; our zeal is cooled, and our religion languishes.

F. The children of God have sometimes DEPEND-ED too much upon their FIRST exercises, and upon what the Lord has done for them in former times. To look back on former experiences is profitable to Christians, when it excites them to walk humbly with God; but when it renders them careless, and makes them think, "Though we are unfaithful, *God is faithful*"; and if a work of grace has ever been "begun in our hearts, of which we have good

“evidence, it will be continued;” to make such an use of past experiences is very dangerous; it leads to security; and this security ends in backsliding.

As these are the causes of declension in religion; so there are certain STEPS by which a soul is led into such a state; for so great a departure from God cannot take place at once, or by the commission of one sin; it must be brought on by degrees; hence it is often the case, that the Christian knows not how he has gone to such a length in backsliding; his case is like that of two bosom friends who have lived together in the closest intimacy; their affection seemed to be such as could never suffer an abatement; but in a course of time, their friendship cools, they know not how: or he is like a man descending into a valley from a lofty hill; he glides insensibly down, before he is aware; but looking back upon the height from which he came, he is surprised to find himself so soon descended from so great an eminence.

Let us, then, trace out the steps which lead to this state of declension; that by this mean, through the divine blessing, those who have begun to backslide, may be prevented from departing farther from God.

1. Those Christians who backslide, have not been sufficiently ENGAGED in heart work; in watching the motions of the soul, and in observing daily what enjoyment they have of the divine presence; hence, they wander from God, and become less inclined to converse with him in secret; or, if they do engage in private duties, they can rest in them, though they may be performed with little spirit or life.

2. Becoming thus careless, they begin to SATISFY themselves, with some of the less essential things in religion; as with such speculative truths, as only illuminate the head; but do not improve the heart.

We would not be understood to insinuate, that the investigation of divine truths is a mean to impede our progress in religion ; so far from this, it is to be considered as a most happy mean of causing us to advance in our journey towards heaven ; but through the depravity of the human heart, and the subtilty of our spiritual enemies, it is possible, that what, in other circumstances, might be very profitable, may, by being misused, prove very hurtful. And this is the case, when we devote the greatest part of our time, to making deep researches into truths, which, though important in themselves, are not, however, such as immediately tend to affect the heart : or, when we do not apply those essential truths, with which we are acquainted, to our own souls, nor make any enquiry what influence they have upon the mind, nor what improvement we make by them, in virtue, and true piety.

3. After this, they begin to WITHDRAW themselves from the COMPANY of those who fear the Lord, especially, from such as would deal faithfully with them, and whose conversation might tend to awaken them. Nor is this to be wondered at ; for when the heart is barren and empty, the mouth must be stopped.

4. At length they become so ENTANGLED, and LOST in the world, that they lose sight of God. One is involved in a multiplicity of business ; another is ensnared by riches and prosperity ; or by honour and preferment ; he is now exposed to the company of the world, and tempted to conform to its customs and manners. Thus Christians are led to indulge themselves in that which they had once renounced ; the communication between God and their souls is interrupted ; their boldness in the cause

of Christ appears no more ; a holy and jealous God, to manifest his displeasure with their conduct, withholds his divine influences, and permits them to go still farther and farther astray. Nor would they ever return from those devious paths, unless the mighty hand of God were stretched out to bring them back into the way of life.

We doubt not, but many, on a strict examination of their own hearts, must be obliged to confess, with shame, that such has been their very case. Happy are they who see this in time, before they fall into a state so awful and alarming ; a situation which makes *the fine gold become dim, and the precious sons of Zion to be as earthen pitchers.*

It is not enough however, to SEE the evil, and to have the CAUSES of it exhibited to our view ; but, that those, who have departed from the ways of the Lord, may be restored, the MEANS of their restoration must be pointed out, which was the FOURTH thing proposed to be shewn.

Come, then, BACKSLIDING and UNFAITHFUL Christian, who art compelled to say, “ this is my name, and my true character.” Stand still for a moment and reflect upon thy ways.—Permit us to ask thee in the name of the Lord, how has it come to pass that thou art so inactive and lifeless in the service of God ? Is there now less pleasure in it, than when thou didst first devote thyself to him ? Is there more substantial comfort to be found, at present, in the world, than at the time thou badest it an eternal adieu, and gavest thyself to God ? Or hast thou ever found *unrighteousness with him ? What hath he done to thee ? In what hath he wearied thee ? Testify against him,* Mich. vi. On the contrary, hath he not been faithful to thee, even then, when he led

thee in the dark and dreary path of affliction? Didst thou not then receive the tokens of his love and goodness? Hath he ever left or forsaken thee? Art thou compelled to answer and to say, "He never
 "was to me a wilderness, a land of darkness: but
 "goodness, truth, and righteousness have marked all
 "his dealings with me: the guilt lies at my own
 "door. It was my sin, my inattention, my folly,
 "which has carried me so far from my God. And
 "what advice can now be given me, what direction
 "can be afforded, with respect to my restoration. For
 "I am fearful that, unless I am speedily helped, I
 "shall continue in my present state, yea, be found
 "in a worse condition, and go to such lengths in
 "backsliding, that all hopes of recovery, and of be-
 "ing received in mercy, must be abandoned.

We grant that thy case is truly deplorable; but still there is hope concerning thee: there have been others in the like condition, whom God, as by a second conversion, hath restored. Be not, then, discouraged, nor give thyself over to despondency: this would render thee unfit to use the means we are about to prescribe to thee.

Art thou, then, distressed by reason of thy departure from God? And is it thy desire to return to him? Certain MEANS are to be USED, and certain THINGS are to be guarded against.

1. Seriously CONSIDER thy miserable SITUATION: view it in all its aggravated circumstances; reflect, how greatly thou hast dishonoured God, by a conduct, which evinces that thou didst esteem his service hard, unsatisfying, and not conducive to thy happiness; and the way to heaven, not a narrow, but a broad and easy one;—call to mind how much thou hast grieved and offended the people of God,

which Jesus looks upon as a sin to which not a little malignity is attached; what a stumbling-block, thou hast been to the world, and what *occasion thou hast given to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme*. Consider, how wretched a life thou art leading thyself; “Thou hast God for thy father, and thy covenant God; but thou hast no freedom of access to him; the avenue to the throne of grace appears to be closed, and thou seemest like one cast away.—Thou hast Jesus for thy friend and husband; but there subsists so great a difference between thee and him, that thou art afraid to profess thy love to him; he seems to be strange to thee; because thy heart accuses thee of dividing thy love between him and the world.—Thou hast the holy Spirit to abide in thee, to counsel and direct thee; but thou dost not experience his comforting influences; because thou hast grieved him: and thus, thou livest as one forsaken. The means of grace profit thee but little. Dost thou meet with difficulties? thou art full of anxiety, of fear, and distress; and thou hast not confidence to *cast thy burdens upon the Lord*.—Does death stare thee in the face, and dost thou reflect on the horrors of the grave? thy soul is disquieted within thee; because the foundations of thy hope lie deeply buried beneath the rubbish of thy corruptions; thou art afraid to believe that thy latter end will be peace.

Consider all these things with deliberation, and reflect that the longer thou continuest thus, the worse thy case must be; for the pious emotions, which thou, yet at times, dost experience, will gradually decrease, and thy religion dwindle into mere formality.

2. Often call to mind the COMMANDS and ADMONITIONS which God has given in his word, to EXCITE thee to return to him. Hear what he says,

Jer. iii. 22, Return ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings: See also verse 1st, Thou hast played the harlot, with many lovers; yet return again unto me saith the Lord.—The Lord Jesus addressed the Church of Ephesus, which had left her first love, saying, *Remember therefore, from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do thy first works,* Rev. ii. 4, 5.

O, BACKSLIDING Christian! the Lord is merciful and gracious; and upon thy coming to him for-
rowing, and distressed for thy sins, he will forgive thine iniquities; he will not remember them, nor upbraid thee with them; but will receive thee again in covenant love. Though thou hast been unfaithful, the ETERNAL abideth true to his promises; the covenant is unchangeable; and because it is a covenant of grace, thy God will manifest to thee that he is gracious. Would Jesus, in no wise cast thee out, when, at the time of your first conversion by faith, thou fleddest to him for refuge, neither will he now reject thee, when thou comest to him, as it were by a second conversion, with a wounded, bleeding heart.—There is no misery so great, no disease so desperate, but Jesus the Saviour can remove and heal it.

3. Has thine heart been affected by divine and gracious invitations to return?—do not rest here; but set apart certain times and seasons for secret FASTING and PRAYER: we are persuaded, that very seldom, if ever, the Lord brings back those who have so far backslidden, but by means of afflictive visitations; such as severe sickness, and other distressing dispensations.—This is proper on GOD'S PART; his glory and honour make it necessary that he should

manifest his hatred of sin; especially, in his own children: for although he hath redeemed them from everlasting destruction, yet he may write such bitter things against them, that they may say, in the language of Heman: “*We suffer thy terrors; we are distracted,*” Ps. lxxxviii. 15.—He is indeed a forgiving God; but still he will avenge himself for the sinful actions done by his people, insomuch that they are made to taste the bitter effects of their iniquities. Have we not a clear example of this in the life of David, the man after God’s own heart? He had grievously sinned; the Lord, afterwards, sent Nathan the prophet to assure him, that he *had put away also the iniquity of that sin*: but, in the very same breath, he must hear the awful denunciation, 2 Sam. 12, 10, “*The sword shall never depart from thine house.*” And, therefore, thou who hast backslidden, ought not to think it strange, if God make thee to feel his fatherly correction; yet, if by these means, thou art brought back to thy former happy state, thou hast reason to be thankful, to adore, and to approve of his wisdom and goodness; for all these dispensations are so many evidences “*that he still careth for thee.*”

But on thy part, also, it is necessary that extraordinary means be used.—Set apart, therefore, days of fasting and prayer, expressly for the purpose of pleading with thy God, to bring thee again to nearness, and fellowship with him; and thus let him see that thou art in earnest, and that thou truly desirest the divine favour.

Dost thou ask, “If I set apart certain times for fasting and prayer; how shall I conduct myself on those occasions?” we reply:

A. CONFESS before God, with shame and confu-

sion of face, thy base and unworthy conduct ; in the language of Ezra, exclaim, “ *O my God ! I am ashamed, and blush to lift up my face to thee*, Ezra ix. 6 ; and with David, say, “ *Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight ; that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.*”

B. Having confessed thy guilt, go to the throne of grace, in prayer and supplication ; present thyself before the Lord, and let him see thy countenance, defiled and deformed as it may be, and say, “ Lord, I neither can nor will conceal from thee my situation ; sinful as I am, I come to look unto thee for restoring grace : I have long enough strayed from thee ; I would now rather here die at thy feet, than continue at a distance from thee, or remain any longer in my sin.”

C. Does thy conscience ACCUSE thee ?—go, like the servants of Benhadad, as with sackcloth upon thy loins, and ropes about thy head, and say to God, “ I have heard of thee, O thou King of Israel, that thou art a merciful King ; and, therefore, I come with a trembling hope to receive thy mercy.” And in the words of the Psalmist, address thy God, saying, “ Lord, be merciful to me ; and according to the multitude of thy tender mercies, blot out my transgressions : pardon mine iniquities, for they are great.”

D. Endeavour to EXERCISE faith upon the Lord Jesus ; fly for refuge to his atoning blood ; cast thyself anew into his arms ; and thus give to him the glory due to his grace, and to the efficacy of his blood, as being sufficient to cleanse from all sin ; and then surrender to him thy sinful, thine impure, thy wandering heart : he is the great Physician ; he can, yea, he will heal all thy spiritual maladies.

E. Frequently RENEW thy covenant with God, as if thou hadst never covenanted with him before. If doubts arise in thy mind, whether thou hast ever entered into covenant with the Lord, what can so readily remove them, as to engage again and again in the solemn work of surrendering thyself unconditionally and cordially to him, to be his for ever ?

F. Yet be not surprised if the Lord does not immediately answer thee in peace, and manifest his loving kindness to thy soul ; for hast thou not often suffered him to call to thee, without hearkening to his voice ? hast thou not, unconcerned, let him depart, as if his friendship and favour were of no importance ? in infinite wisdom, therefore, he may think fit to correct thee, by not permitting thee, at the moment when thou callest, to find him. Yea, it may be that he may suffer thee to walk in darkness all thy days, and even in this situation to enter the eternal world ; but, even supposing this should be the case, still continue SEEKING and CLEAVING to the Lord : surely he is worthy to be earnestly sought after, and it is good to wait upon him. If, BACKSLIDING Christian, thou mayest not be permitted to enjoy his presence any more in this life ; yet, after death, thou wilt see him eye to eye, in a blessed eternity ; and then, as great as thy present darkness may be, so great, and infinitely greater will be thy light and joy.

G. In addition to all this, DAILY DEPART from the evil of thy ways ; practise virtue and holiness, that thus the stumbling-block which thou mayest have laid in the way of any, and any offence which thou mayest have given, may be removed.

But are these the MEANS which are to be USED by thee, to the end that thou mayest, with the divine blessing, be restored to thy former situation, and its

concomitant joys? we further remark, that there are CERTAIN things, against which thou hast need of being on thy guard.

1. WATCH with all attention against THOSE SINS which were the cause of thy declension in religion: hate them with a holy hatred. Do they assault thee? oppose and wage an eternal war against them.

2. WATCH not only against a SLOTHFUL TEMPER, which makes *the hands to hang down*; but see to it, *that the hands and feeble knees be lifted up, and make straight paths for thy feet.*

3. WATCH against NEGLIGENCE in the use of means which may tend to awaken and excite thee to action. Attend with diligence to all the duties of religion; search the precious word of God; let the pious be thy companions and bosom friends; though thou mayest have separated thyself from their society, they will receive thee again in love, upon evidencing on thy part, an inclination to associate again with them; for thee, their prayers will ascend to the throne; and by their counsel and advice, they will seek to bring thee back to thy Redeemer and thy God.

4. Above all, WATCH against making sinners, who know not, who love not, but oppose Jesus, thy CONSTANT companions; hold intercourse with them only when necessity demands it; for to walk with such, and to go hand in hand with them, might have the fatal tendency of leading thee farther astray from thy God.

5. WATCH against a DEPENDENCE upon thine own strength: this was the cause of Peter's fall. At all times acknowledge that thou art insufficient of thyself to do any thing acceptable to God; and that, unless the JEHOVAH place, every moment, everlast-

ing arms beneath thee, thou wilt, like the wandering sheep, stray farther from thy fold. Look then continually to thy Jesus, in every situation; and make use of him as thine only Saviour and Redeemer.

Do any now inquire, “in what manner such a backsliding Christian should act, with respect to the HOLY SUPPER of the Lord?” whether he may venture to approach, or whether it be best for him to abstain?—we reply; it is a truth, founded upon experience, that no person ever made any advancement in the divine life, but rather declined in religion, by abstaining from this ordinance. But still we would not assert, that a person in such a case ought to draw nigh; for if, O BACKSLIDER, thou art still in such a state of insensibility, and art wandering farther and farther from thy God, thou art not in a situation to receive the pledges of his love: but is thy heart in some measure affected with thy condition? is it the desire of thy soul to awake from thy stupor? then we advise thee,

1. To HUMBLE thy heart before thy Redeemer God, and let a blush cover thy countenance: because thou hast so often attended upon that ordinance, when thy soul was so unconcerned, and when thou wert backsliding from thy God; and because too, notwithstanding thy most solemn and sacred vows to be faithful to him, thou hast forgotten thine engagements and proved unfaithful.

2. Then we advise thee to go *forward* to make use of the Holy Supper of our Lord, not so much for the support and strengthening of thy spiritual life, as for the healing of the wounds and diseases of thy soul.—There the blood of Jesus is exhibited as having healing virtue. There *thou wilt sit beneath the shade of the tree of life; the leaves of which are for*

the healing of nations.—Go with thy wounds to the great and good Samaritan, that he may pour into them the oil of joy, and administer to thee the wine of consolation.—Thus to come to the table, will be to approach with profit to thy soul.

3. CAST thyself ANew upon thy God, firmly resolving in thy Jesus' strength to be more faithful to him; to be more zealous in promoting his best interests than thou hast hitherto been, and to delight more in *keeping his righteous statutes*.

But perhaps thou wilt reply, “all those means are good, when the foundation stands strong; but I am afraid that I am not within the covenant; that my faith is but a temporary faith; and that I am one of those of whom Paul speaks, *who having been once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and of the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come; but have fallen away.*”—To such an one we must say, it is, indeed, no wonder that thou art in darkness and in fear; for it is not a light matter to forsake God, as thou hast done; to have been so unfaithful to him, and to have given such cause for the blaspheming of his holy name; but still, in the midst of all this, there may be seen some evidences of grace: for although the spouse *slept, her heart waked.*—We ask thee, then,

1. When thou calmly lookest back to the time when thou first gavest thyself to Jesus, art thou not filled with shame, on account of thy conduct since that period? and is it not, at the same time, the desire of thy soul, that it *were with thee as in months past; when the candle of the Lord shone upon thee*, and when by the light of it, thou didst walk through the dark shades that furrounded thee?

2. Dost thou not experience a HATRED of sin, and

a desire to depart from it; especially from those sins which were the procuring causes of thy declension in the life of faith? dost thou not blush to reflect on them, and condemn thyself for thy folly, in choosing those things which tend to deprive thee of the friendship of thy God.

3. When the Lord Jesus, in all his preciousness and beauty, is placed before thee, canst thou not profess that thou hast at least some love for him, and some desires of soul after him?

4. Is it not the wish of thy heart to be recovered from thy declension, and to return to the Lord? would it not produce real joy and satisfaction in thy heart, if the Lord were to bring thee back to thy former situation, though it were even through the furnace of affliction, rather than to continue departing from thy Father and thy Redeemer: is it not the language of thy soul; “*Lord, I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant: for I do not forget thy commandments?*”

Dost thou experience these things? they are evidences that the root of the matter is in thee.—Make use, then, of the means which we have faithfully pointed out to thee, and we trust that thou wilt not use them in vain; but that the Lord will accompany them with his blessing.

Let us now, in the last place, endeavour to apply this subject to our several cases respectively; but perhaps it may be asked, “Why the backslidings of God’s people should be so fully held up to view? for men in general have no conceptions of these things, and few of the children of God are in such a state as has been described; besides, it proves a stumbling-block to the world.”

We do indeed wish that the faults of God’s people

could be concealed ; but the world cannot but often observe them ; and we apprehend that such a representation of them as has been given, may tend to convince mankind, that the way which leads to life is a narrow way, since even those who are within the bonds of the covenant, when they go astray, have to experience much distress and anxiety, before they are again restored ; this must make them think, “ If
“ such be the case of those who are so precious in the
“ eyes of the Lord, what must become of us, who are
“ yet in our sins ? ”

O, careless sinner ! be alarmed—*If these things be done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry ?* Will God visit his PEOPLE with the rod, when they sin ; must *they* taste the bitter effects of their transgressions who have a surety to deliver them from everlasting punishment ; who have God for their rock and their portion ; who have Jesus as their king ; and the Spirit abiding in them ?—O, what will be thy wretchedness, when thou shalt suffer the punishment of everlasting *destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power ?* “ *If the righteous be scarcely saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear ?* ”

Believe it, sin must be seen and mourned over, either in the present or in a future life : if thou art not distressed on account of it in this world, thou wilt feel the wrath of God, the punishment due unto it, in the next ; seek then to obtain a knowledge of the dreadful consequences attendant upon the transgression of the divine law ; plead with God to work, in thy heart, repentance unto life, that, forsaking thy sin, thou mayest walk in the ways of wisdom and righteousness.

But this subject is peculiarly useful to the PEOPLE OF GOD, and,

1. That those who have already begun to stumble and fall, may be admonished in due time, to arise and return to the Lord, before they depart still farther from him. Are there present, in this assembly, those who have not backslidden as others have done ; yet, if they are not walking so tenderly and circumspectly as formerly, it becomes them also to confess it, taking shame and confusion of face to themselves : let others be a warning to you ; see by what steps they have so greatly declined, and how insensibly one may backslide from one degree to another, till restoration is not to be expected without much sorrow and distress ; lift up then the hands which hang down ; confess before God your repeated departures from him, and firmly resolve, through grace, now, when you are about to approach the table of the Lord, that in future you will be more faithful to your covenant God ; give yourselves over to him anew, that under the influences of his Spirit, *ye may perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord.*

2. This subject may be very useful to STRONG believers, and TO ALL who are going on with cheerfulness in the way of life. Pious souls!—*Be not high-minded.* Think not that it is your own wisdom or prudence that has kept you hitherto from falling. If God had not preserved you, ye would long ere now have forsaken him ; for ye have the same sinful hearts, and the same enemies as others, seeking to lead you astray. Therefore we exhort you, *Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.* Do ye ask by what means ye may be still preserved in this your comfortable state ? We counsel you—

A. BEWARE of the FIRST step leading to declen-

sion. The first step is, perhaps, almost imperceptible: but no one can tell how soon the strength of indwelling sin, set in motion by external enemies, may lead you astray. It often happens, that but a little period elapses between persons being hurried into sin, and becoming inclined to neglect the duties which the holy religion of Jesus prescribes.

B. ALWAYS let it be deeply IMPRESSED on your minds, that ye have to do with a holy God, who cannot take pleasure in iniquity; and that, therefore, the smallest sin, if it be not mourned over, must produce an estrangement between you and your God. Suffer then no sin to remain in you, unrepented of; but fly daily to the blood of Jesus, and plead for an interest in his intercession.

C. NEVER, without an absolute necessity, be found at those places where ye may be in danger of being led astray. Had Peter not been present in the hall of the high priest, he would not so easily have fallen into the sin of denying his Master. Are ye at any time brought into such circumstances? then, under a deep impression of your moral impotency, be much in prayer to God for preserving grace.

D. BE constantly in the practice of holding communion with God in secret. Let some portion of every day be spared from worldly business, for this exercise. There is no better mean to preserve you from sin.

E. FORSAKE *not the assembling of yourselves together*, but endeavour to excite one another to love, and to good works. And do ye meet with any who are beginning to backslide? pity them, and attend to the exhortation of Paul,—*Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore*

“such an one, in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou be also tempted.” Gal. vi. 1.

F. *Converse* much with your own hearts ; attend strictly to what proceeds from them ; this will make you circumspect, and immediately enable you to discover when ye begin to stray from God. *“Keep thy heart with all diligence ; for out of it are the issues of life.”* Whilst you are thus exercised, the Lord, who is faithful, will manifest his faithfulness to you, and not only preserve you from declension, but cause you to go on your way rejoicing, till you arrive at those blissful regions, where all sin, and every temptation to it, shall for ever cease.

A M E N.

T H E

PIOUS COMMUNICANT.

Lecture VIII.

ON COVENANTING WITH GOD, PREPARATORY
TO AN APPROACH TO THE TABLE
OF THE LORD.



AS the signs and seals of the covenant can be used, with profit, only by those who are interested in the covenant itself, we conceived that it would be advantageous, after having treated so minutely as we have done, in the preceding lectures on the doctrine of faith, to invite your attention, now, TO THE EXERCISES OF A SOUL in the act of COVENANTING WITH THE LORD; and to the MANNER in which the BELIEVER yields his consent to all the terms of the covenant; not only when FIRST he enters within its bonds, but AFTERWARDS, on every renewal of it.

To meditate on a subject so glorious, divine, and interesting, is at all times profitable; both to direct and animate the redeemed of the Lord: and, with the divine blessing, to unfold the nature of the covenant, to the view of those who are yet strangers to it, and sweetly to compel them to enter within its bonds. —But, on an occasion like the present, when public-

ly invited to attend on the solemnities of the Holy Sacrament of the Supper, where we look for the presence of Jesus, the master of the feast, and great head of the covenant, to have this subject set before us, in all its parts, is highly useful and necessary : for by it the God of the covenant is glorified ; and our souls may enjoy the exquisite delight which fellowship with God, as our covenant God, affords.

To do justice to this copious subject, we must shew,

I. That all the elect of God, as long as they are not interested in the covenant of grace, must be viewed as creatures in a state of INABILITY and UNWILLINGNESS to comply with its terms, and not only perfectly INDIFFERENT with respect to God and his covenant, but OPPOSED to both.

II. What God the Holy Spirit does on his part, to INFLUENCE the impotent and unwilling sinner, to yield his consent to the covenant.

III. In what this CONSENT the covenant consists : after which we shall,

IV. Offer some *directions* to those who desire to enter into covenant with God, with respect to the best MANNER of doing it, so as to evidence faithfulness towards the Lord, and to experience divine consolations in their souls : and then,

V. INQUIRE, “ when a soul may be said to ENTER into covenant with God ; and having once entered within its bonds, on what occasions the believer ought to RENEW the same.

VI. POINT out the means which those, who have clear evidences that they are within the bonds of the covenant, ought to use, in order to preserve their confidence, and to restore it whenever it may in any wise be shaken.

VII. ENDEAVOUR to remove the difficulties which may arise in the minds of God's covenant people; to the end that they be encouraged and comforted.

VIII. SHOW how necessary and useful this subject is, to prepare the heart for a profitable approach to the Holy Supper of our Lord.

IX. *Clofe*, with an applicatory address, both to SINNERS, and to the PEOPLE of God.

As the several matters proposed for discussion, are so copious and important, it cannot be expected that we can do justice to each, if all are discussed in a single lecture. We shall at present, therefore, only invite your attention to the THREE FIRST, and to the TWO LAST, which have been specified in the above division.—Those which remain, will be treated of in the succeeding lecture.

We proceed then, FIRST, to show that all SINNERS, even the ELECT, are by nature UNABLE and UNWILLING to enter into covenant with God; yea, perfectly INDIFFERENT about the matter, and what is still more, OPPOSED to it.

1. They are UNABLE; for as by nature they are wholly incapacitated to do any good thing, so they cannot submit to the requisitions of God's covenant; sin and Satan hold them so fast in their chains and fetters, that they may be said to be *captives at their will*. Were the covenant proposed to them, and its contents presented in ever so clear a light, they are not in a condition to see its preciousness; for they have not the *eyes of their understanding enlightened*, and consequently, the *things of the Spirit of God are foolishness to them*.

2. They are not only unable, but UNWILLING also, to enter into covenant with God: for,

A. They are so infatuated by the world, and so much under the power of corrupt nature, that nothing can divert them from their carnal pursuits : no human energies incline them to pursue a different course.

B. Besides, the demands which the covenant makes upon all within its bonds, are diametrically opposed to their carnal hearts, and require that indulgence in sin and lust be entirely restricted ; and therefore they say unto God, *depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways* : and with Israel, *who profaned the ordinances of the Lord*, they exclaim, *behold ! what a weariness is it !*

3. They are perfectly UNCONCERNED and INDIFFERENT about entering into covenant with God : sinners, whilst unconverted, come not so far, in general, as seriously and calmly to reflect upon their own state, their eternal happiness, salvation, or destruction. Heaven and hell are objects on which they seldom meditate ; but like those *that dwell at ease in Zion, and trust in the mountains of Samaria*, they consider not what their end will be. Hence it is, that neither God, nor the mediator, nor the covenant, nor the blessings which it contains, are *in all their thoughts*. These are objects in which they feel no interest.

4. Sinners are wholly OPPOSED to God and his covenant.—The opposition of the carnal mind to God, to his service, and to his children, is so great, that the tongue cannot express it, nor language the most copious describe it : hence it comes to pass, that when the word is preached in faithfulness, and the way to life represented as *narrow*, and found only by few, their hearts are filled with hatred ; and sometimes, to manifest their enmity, they turn into ridicule,

truths the most heavenly and divine, and make them the objects of their derision : if all who are unconverted go not to such lengths, yet they evince their opposition to God in this, that they refuse the offers of mercy which are made to them in the gospel, and enter not within the covenant until, at last, overcome by the invincible and sweetly attractive influences of the Holy Ghost, they are *compelled to come in*.

This leads us to the SECOND thing proposed, which was, to show WHAT GOD THE HOLY GHOST DOES, in order to influence such impotent, unwilling, unconcerned and rebellious sinners, to enter within the bonds of the covenant, by yielding their sincere consent to it. The operations performed by the Holy Spirit, are the following ;

1. God the Holy Ghost, finding the sinner dead, BREATHES into him THE PRINCIPLE OF SPIRITUAL LIFE ; and what the soul is to the body, that the Spirit is to the soul—a FOUNTAIN OF LIFE. In consequence of having this living principle given him, he experiences affections and emotions, very different from what he ever before felt, and is exercised altogether in another manner : this vital principle, and the effects which it produces, are not immediately ascertained with precision by the subject of them, “ whether they have proceeded from the Spirit of God, or whether they be sparks which a conscience convinced of sin hath enkindled ;” but the soul afterwards distinctly discovers the work to be of God, by his succeeding operations : for,

2. The Holy Ghost having excited life in the soul, causes that principle to become ACTIVE. The soul is awakened into attention ; the sinner, like the prodigal son, begins to *come to himself*. If he attend on the

word preached, he hears with another ear, those truths which relate to his eternal happiness ; to the interesting doctrines of the misery of man by nature, and to those which unfold salvation to be of God in Christ: he now listens with the eager attention of one, who feels that his eternal ALL depends upon his knowledge of them: we are certain that every child of God, and every awakened sinner will confirm our assertions, and say, “ yes, it is so ; formerly I “ read the word of God ; I went up to the courts of “ the Lord ; but what I read, made little or no impression on my mind ; and the precious truths “ which fell from the lips of Christ’s ambassadors, “ were heard as things in which I felt myself not “ much interested : but since God hath touched my “ heart, those very truths are set forth to my view in “ quite another light. They affect my heart ; they “ come with power to my soul ; and it is as if those “ very ministers, who so often before preached to me “ the gospel, had received another Spirit.”

3. Hath the Holy Ghost thus awakened the sinner to attend to *the things which belong to his everlasting peace* ? he next opens to his view THE LOST, MISERABLE, AND WRETCHED state in which he is by nature, and whilst uninterested in Christ. Now the sinner sees himself in his true character ; in consequence of which, he that once *thought himself increased with goods*, now begins to exclaim, “ *I am wretched, “ and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked, and am “ in need of ALL things*, Rev. iii. 17.—Now I see and “ believe, that I have never believed in Jesus Christ ; “ that *I am full of wounds and bruises, and putrifying “ sores* ; and that without an interest in God and “ Christ, I shall for ever be wretched : and therefore “ I stand ready to subscribe with heart and hand,

“ to all that God hath declared in his word, concern-
“ ing sinners ; that they are vile, unclean, rebels to
“ his government, and enemies both to his law and
“ gospel ;—Now I am convinced that whatever God
“ in his word declares, is truth ; I once thought that
“ I was not so great a sinner ; I once did not feel
“ my misery ; I thought that all was well ; but now
“ I clearly see that I erred in judgment, and that my
“ sins are of a scarlet colour, and of a crimson dye ;
“ that my condition is deplorable : that I am the chief
“ of sinners.” And, beloved, this dreadful discovery
produces such an effect upon the heart, that the
sinner is so distressed, disquieted, ashamed, and hum-
bled before God, that perhaps, bursting into tears, he
exclaims, “ *I perish, what shall I do to be saved ; if I*
“ *continue as I am, I am lost for ever.*”

4. At this moment, the Holy Ghost enables the soul
to see the FULNESS, the ALL-SUFFICIENCY, and
PRECIOUSNESS which there is in JESUS ; but this
is not always seen immediately in the clearest manner ;
for, whilst the sinner is so oppressed by a sight and
feeling sense of his misery ; he cannot discover that
fulness which Christ possesses, as it really is ; but yet,
even at this time, the Holy Spirit enables him to dis-
cover some manifestations of the mediatorial glories
of the divine Redeemer, to the end that he may not
distrust, or fall into despair. He is next brought by
the same divine agent, to a discovery that *God hath*
thoughts of peace towards him ; that there is a *covenant*
of grace ; that it is established for sinners—for great sin-
ners—for the greatest of sinners ; and, what is more,
that the Eternal invites him to accept of it : and that
the only question proposed is, whether he cordially
chooses the way which God hath exhibited in his

gospel? if so, that then God, on his part, is willing to receive him in mercy.

5. The same divine agent, having made these glorious discoveries to the sinner, **EXCITES** in his soul an **HUNGERING** and *thirsting* after God, Christ, and the covenant. This hunger and thirst usually rises to such a degree, as to make him exclaim, “ *My soul thirsteth after thee ; my flesh longeth for God ; yea, as the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after Jesus, and the living God.*”—The hungering and thirsting soul hath its desires so ardent, that it is continually waiting upon God, and wrestling with him in prayer. “ I know not whence it is,” saith the person, thus led by the Spirit, “ but it is a truth ; at all times my heart is going out after God, and that even in the midst of business ; though once I knew not what it was to pray, I am now enabled to wrestle with God for grace, and an interest in Christ.” But let it not be supposed, that whilst the soul experiences all this, it will meet with no opposition : no ; Satan is vigilant continually to throw obstacles in the way, and suggests that the work is not **GENUINE**, and is not from **GOD**. But even this opposition works for good, as it drives the soul to fly with speedy wing to its God, and in secret to lay before him the cause of its distress ; and in prayer to cry, “ Lord, thou knowest that I love thee, “ and that life loses all its delights, unless I am permitted to enjoy fellowship with thee.”

6. At this time the Spirit, by his powerful and attractive energy, **BOWS THE WILL** in so effectual a manner, that the soul not only hungers and thirsts after Christ ; but it is drawn out in love to him ; it now runs ; it flies to Jesus ; it sees so much worthiness in him, that it neither will nor can be persuaded to keep

any longer without the covenant ; it therefore enters within its bonds, and says AMEN to every proposition it makes.—O, says the soul, “ If to enter into the covenant, be to have the heart disposed to yield a cordial consent to Christ’s offers, and to approve of God’s testimony, I will, with Rebecca, also say, I *will follow the man* ; and with queen Esther, I *will go to the King, and touch his sceptre, and if I perish, I perish.*”

7. The soul being thus inclined to consent to all that the covenant proposes, the Holy Spirit usually gives it some ASSURANCE that it hath really entered into covenant with God, and that its exercises are upright and sincere ; and this he does,

A. ORDINARILY ; when he enables the soul to see, after it has examined into its true situation, by the marks laid down in the word, that its various exercises are in every respect consonant to those marks, and consequently are of the same kind with those which God’s covenant people possess.

B. EXTRAORDINARILY ; when the Spirit of God addresses the soul, saying, “ I will not only cause thee to see by the eye of faith ; but I will permit thee to TASTE, and to prove from actual experience, what it is to have an interest in such a covenant God ; in so precious a Jesus : and in a covenant which is *so well ordered and sure.* Wilt thou, by a kind of prelibation, *eat of the clusters of grapes* ; the first fruits of the heavenly Canaan ? behold, I give thee the *white stone, the hidden manna* : full and perfect fruition is reserved for you in heaven ; ye are children of God, and therefore, heirs of an eternal inheritance ;”—The soul, receiving such extraordinary assurance, instead of being elated by pride, is humbled, and rejoices ; is filled

with astonishment, and is grateful in a degree which is better experienced than expressed.

8. The Spirit having thus given assurances to the soul of its interest in God, and the blessings of the covenant, proceeds, in the next place, to ADORN it; that it may be a pleasing BRIDE for Christ, he makes it glorious, by causing it to partake of the divine nature; by implanting in it those graces, by which it is made to resemble God, and is *perfect in the comeliness, which he puts on it*, Ezek. xvi. 14;—Hence Jesus can say to the soul, “*thou art my sister, my spouse, my dove, my undefiled;*” and address it in the words of Solomon, Cant. vi. 5; and iv. 7—*Turn away thine eyes from me; for they have overcome me.—Thou art all fair, my love, and there is no spot in thee.*

9. Upon this, the Holy Spirit gives the soul a holy BOLDNESS TO KEEP up an intercourse with God, as a covenant God: it is enabled to see, “*that the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; that he manifests his love to them, and makes the light of his countenance to shine upon them; hence, the soul is encouraged to unbosom itself to him; to confess its various defections from him; to plead his covenant, and to remind him of his promises: this is that drawing near unto God, which the Psalmist represents as being so good and delightful. In addition to all this, the soul finds “that the name of the Lord is a strong tower, into which the righteous run, and are safe.”*

10. Hath the Spirit carried on the work of grace in the heart to all these lengths? of one thing we may be assured, he WILL NEVER FORSAKE THE WORK OF HIS HAND; but will constantly keep his hand upon it, and that in so affectionate, paternal,

and endearing a manner, that, although the soul, which hath entered within the bonds of the covenant, may fall into sin, he gives it the best of assurances that he will never totally and finally depart from it, but, upon sincere confession of its guilt, will receive it in mercy again; so that if, at any time, it be *visited with the rod*, even that shall *work for good*, and be attended with this peculiar advantage, the bringing of the soul nearer to its maker. But,

11. Lastly, the Holy Spirit not only leads and guides all who are in covenant with God, in all the vicissitudes of life, but he has also undertaken to BRING them over the Jordan of death, and land them on the peaceful shores of the celestial Canaan, where all the benefits of the covenant are enjoyed in their highest perfection.

See thus, the work of God's Spirit, not only as it respects the entrance of the believer into covenant with God, but as it is displayed, through life, and in the hour when his nature dissolves.

We now come to the THIRD and principal part of our subject; which was, particularly to shew in what consists THE SINNER'S CONSENT TO THE COVENANT.—To do this, we must,

I. Inquire what it supposes:

II. Show the nature of this consent, which the soul yields, and,

III. Point out when a soul may be considered as yielding such consent.

A. It is SUPPOSED, when we speak of the soul's consenting to the covenant, “that God, as the God of the covenant, makes a FREE and FULL OFFER of grace and salvation unto ALL SINNERS that live under the gospel, upon the terms stipulated in the word: in this view, the whole of the sacred oracles may be

considered as an invitation, which the God of heaven sends to the sinner, soliciting him to enter into a covenant engagement with himself; and then the covenant may best be represented by the marriage covenant.—The ministers of the gospel are the spiritual *Eleazars*, who are sent out to seek a bride for Christ—they unfold to the sinner, the covenant in all its parts; shew what God requires, demands, and promises, and open all the treasures and riches of their king: but what is the agency of the Holy Spirit, at this time? He causes the mercy offered in the gospel, to AFFECT the heart of the sinner, whom he is about bringing within the bonds of the covenant; he makes him see the VALUE of the offered blessing, and the propriety of accepting it; he makes him desirous also of being INTERESTED in it; he enables him to comprehend the meaning of the phrases, “to hunger and thirst after Christ, to run and to flee to God in Christ, as a miserable sinner, and as one pursued by the avenger of blood:” he, in a word, presents fully to view, the mercy and compassion of God, exercised towards the wretched sins of men: the soul, being now made to observe all this, stands still, and thus reasons with itself: “what grace is here! will the God of heaven do so much to evidence his merciful character? will he invite and intreat me to come to him? yea, does he *swear* that *he hath no pleasure* in my death; but that he would delight in my salvation and eternal happiness; and shall I any longer refuse to comply with his precious invitation?—No, I will no longer delay.—The proposal of the Lord meets with my full approbation.”—The Holy Ghost having cleared up all the difficulties which were in the way, the soul is now in a situation to yield, and does actually yield

its full consent to the covenant.—The peculiar NATURE of which consent must

B. Now be shown. In doing this, we shall first show what it is, and then enlarge on its several PROPERTIES.

To yield one's consent to the covenant, may be defined : “ a rational, humble, believing, and internal “ reception or embracing of the covenant in all its “ parts, as well its conditions as promises, by the will “ and the heart.”

Thus to consent to the covenant, is essentially the same as what we term to enter into covenant with God; so that to enter into covenant, is nothing more than saying AMEN to the terms which God proposes in the covenant, or manifesting an inclination or willingness to give ourselves over to God in Christ.—But let us now attend to each of the above particulars : we have said that the soul, in covenanting with God,

1. Yields a RATIONAL consent ; but, in making the observation, let not those whose knowledge of divine truths is confined within narrow limits, have their fears alarmed, as if we would insinuate that none can enter into covenant with God, but those who have the most distinct and enlarged views of spiritual things. No : doubtless many have been for years within the bonds of the covenant, and now are in glory, who have never been able, with precision, to point out the circumstances of time and place, in which they covenanted with Jehovah ; and the reasons why they could not designate the one or the other, might have been either their WANT of KNOWLEDGE sufficient to convince them that what they experienced at the time was really covenanting with God ; or UNBELIEF, by which they dared not presume to engage in a work so solemn, or to hold an intercourse with God so familiar :—however,

notwithstanding this, the soul covenanting with God, yields a rational consent ; seeing God deals with it in a rational manner ; for as soon as it is brought under convictions, it attains to a knowledge of God, of itself, and of the ways of God : the understanding being thus enlightened, the soul judges of spiritual things very differently from what it formerly did. The judgment now formed is upon the most solid grounds : it is a judgment proceeding from the deepest conviction of truth ; and in this manner the soul entering into covenant, is persuaded both of the fitness and pleasantness of the method, which God has appointed for the salvation of sinners ; and is constrained to say, “ since God has so deeply impressed divine “ truths upon my mind ; I have altogether different “ views of them from what I once had.”

2. The soul, in covenanting with God, not only yields a rational but a voluntary and free consent. We distinguish between a free, and voluntary consent ; because a person may do a thing voluntarily, when, in a certain sense, he may be compelled to do it, and would not, were he not under some necessity : this may be elucidated by the following instance : “ a person has been convicted of murder ; to rescue “ himself from the hand of justice, he voluntarily offers an assignment of his whole estate, to the person “ that will aid him in effecting his escape ;” but this is not a FREE act ; for were he in a situation not so desperate, and in which he could act according to his pleasure, he never would have made this offer :—not merely voluntary, then, is the consent which the soul yields to the covenant, but free : there is no compulsion or force exercised upon the will—it is true, when conscience is awakened, by a view of the righteousness of God, the curses of the law, and the fear of hell, the

finner is constrained to seek God for grace ; but in all this he acts freely ; for God is the former of the spirit which is in man ; and because he hath formed it, so, like clay which is in the hand of the potter, he may mould and incline it at his pleasure. He inclines the unwilling heart to his service, and makes it to act freely.

A. In OPPOSING SIN, the WORLD and SATAN ; as much devoted as the soul once was to these, so much it now desires to forsake, and bid them a final adieu ; feeling no constraint, and acting perfectly free in the matter, it expresses itself thus ; “ I do not leave “ my sinful pursuits because I am forced, but because “ I will ; to me the world has lost its charms ; its “ pleasures and amusements so far from delighting, “ they disgust ; I am averse to them.”

B. As the heart is now inclined, freely, to relinquish the service of sin, so it is made willing to CHOOSE GOD and Christ ; and to ENGAGE in his service.—The soul can now say, “ I choose the ways of godliness ; not in consequence of any compulsion, or merely because, from my relation to him as a creature, I am sacredly obligated so to do ; but because I feel my heart sweetly inclined to them ; and if there were no eternity, no salvation, nor condemnation depending, to induce such a choice, I see so much excellency in God, so much preciousness in the Lord Jesus, and so much satisfaction to be derived from his service, that I cannot any longer refrain, but must, with the Psalmist, cry out, “ *I love thee, O Lord, my strength.*”

3. The consent which the soul yields to the covenant, is a CORDIAL one ; by which we mean,

A. That it is not only a consent of the mouth, but also of the HEART.—The God of the covenant

makes the demand, saying, "*my son, give me thine heart :*" the soul immediately replies ; " Lord, here it is, I yield it up to thee."

B. If the consent which is thus given, be CORDIAL, it necessarily follows, that the WHOLE heart must unite in it : it is a solemn act, in which the UNDERSTANDING, the JUDGMENT, the WILL, the AFFECTIONS, together with all the POWERS of soul, are engaged.

a. The UNDERSTANDING ; and then the language of the soul is, " I cannot be satisfied with a " mere speculative contemplation of the God of the " covenant, of the Mediator, and the Spirit of the " covenant, of its demands, and precious benefits ; " for, whenever I turn my eyes upon either of them, " I see so much glory and excellency in each, that I " feel myself to be delightfully drawn, and altogether " willing to make an unreserved surrender of myself " to God."

b. The JUDGMENT :—the soul at this time forms a judgment, which perfectly accords with that which is formed by the Eternal himself, viz.—that a person is happy or miserable, as he is within or without the bonds of the covenant ; and, therefore,

c. The WILL consents to the terms of the covenant, and approves of it in all its parts : the language of the soul is, " all my desires at once centre in God, as " the most glorious object : I esteem it my greatest " privilege that I may be permitted to declare to " God, my full approbation of all he has proposed " in the gospel."

d. The AFFECTIONS of the soul are all engaged in this solemn transaction ; love, hatred, hope, fear, joy, and sorrow, conspire to induce the soul to leave all its concerns with the Lord.

c. Yes, says the person covenanting with God, it is my will, that not only my soul be active for God, but also that my BODY engage in his service; and that *all my members become instruments of righteousness unto God*, Rom. vi. 13.

4. The soul, in covenanting with God, yields a HUMBLE consent.—It is not to be expressed how humble, how low, and how contemptible it feels itself to be in the sight of God, even whilst it is dealing with its Father in heaven with the boldness and confidence of a child—at a view of its own unworthiness, its pride falls, and it expresses itself in language not foreign to this, “O, LORD, WHAT IS THY
“SERVANT! but having heard that thou wilt look
“upon the poor, and that thou wilt receive in mercy the helpless, and those sensible of their barrenness and unfruitfulness; and feeling that in myself
“I am nothing, and have nothing, I am impelled
“to cast myself as a poor beggar before thy throne;
“I come to thee, as the humble publican, scarcely
“daring to *lift up mine eyes towards heaven*; I cannot
“refrain from adapting to myself the language of the
“centurion, and saying, *Lord, I am not worthy that
“thou shouldst come under my roof*; and sensible as I
“am of being by nature the vilest of the vile; if I
“venture to ask a blessing at thy hands, it will be in
“the humble language of the woman of Canaan;
“Lord, let *the crumbs* of divine grace be dispensed to
“me, *a dog*.”—Such frames of mind are peculiarly acceptable to God; they are like the blushes on the countenance of the bride, which produce the pleasing effect of rendering her still more lovely; where they are found, the soul is humbled in the dust, but Jehovah is exalted, as *all and in all*.

5. It is a BELIEVING consent. For, to consent

to what God offers in his covenant, is to believe.—But the question here arises, In what manner does the soul exercise that faith; we answer thus; The Holy Spirit has given to it a twofold view, both that it may behold its misery and wretchedness; and look unto the Lord Jesus Christ as an all-sufficient Saviour; the result of which has been, that the soul is led to the performance of two distinct acts; to abandon its own righteousness, and at Jesus' invitation, to run and fly to him, in order to *receive out of his fulness, and grace for grace*.—Now, says the soul, I am ready, because of the testimony *which God hath given of his Son, that in him is life*, to accept of his offer, and thus *set to my seal that God is true*:—yes, I also believe, not only that God is willing to become the covenant God of sinners, but that he is willing to be my covenant God; and therefore, with a believing heart, I say AMEN to it.

6. It is a SINCERE and UPRIGHT consent which the soul yields, in covenanting with God; we would not insinuate, that now the soul becomes so perfect, that no sins nor deficiencies are any more to be found; to assert any thing of the kind, would be both contrary to the word, and to the experience of the saints in all ages: but if not absolutely perfect, it is truly sincere; “the Lord is my witness, saith the soul, “that my views and intentions, with respect to him, “are upright; that in the rectitude of my heart, I “have bidden a final adieu to sin, Satan and the world; “that I have declared these to be my enemies, and “number them among those things which harass and “burden me:—the Lord knoweth my struggles, my “wrestlings, my groans in secret, by reason of them; “and therefore, thou God of the covenant, that heart “which is yet so sinful, I am not afraid to bring

“ to the test of thy word, and of the experiences of thy people, and to the scrutiny of thine all-seeing eye.”

A. “ What respects my own CONSCIENCE, I know that I have a deceitful heart, and that in many things it condemns me of having various and great sins ; but in this it cannot condemn me, that I have acted a deceitful part in covenanting with God.”

B. “ Neither, Lord, am I afraid to stand the test of thy WORD ; for, when I see what it requires of those who are invited to enter into covenant with thee, and examine what has passed in my own soul, I cannot but acknowledge, that I am one of those, with whom thou art willing to enter into covenant ; for, there I read, that thou invitest the poor, the mourners in Zion, the hungry and the thirsty, and those who are sensible that strength is not in themselves, to preserve the life of their souls.”

C. “ And, when I hold intercourse with thy children, am told of their EXPERIENCES, see their exercises, and read their writings, although I have never seen their persons, my heart can perfectly unite with them ; what they experience, I experience ; there may, indeed, be a difference, with respect to circumstances and manner ; but with regard to essential points, I find that God has fulfilled his word by Jeremiah ; “ *and I will give them one heart, and one way.*”

D. “ But, that I may not, after all, deceive myself, I come with my heart as it is, and lay it before THINE OMNISCIENT EYE ; *do thou search and try me, see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting,*” Ps. cxxxix.

Surely, when the soul thus deals with itself, and God speaks peace to it, may it not be said, in the act of covenanting, to be sincere and upright?

7. Again, the consent which the soul yields, in covenanting with God, is INTERNAL OR SECRET; none are present but God and the believer, on this solemn occasion—in covenant transactions among men, only the parties are in contract; it is particularly the case in the marriage covenant: when the bridegroom and the bride bind themselves to one another, they do not call on a third person; it is exactly similar with the soul which enters into a marriage covenant with Christ: none must be present; the spiritual intercourse is maintained alone between God and it:—To the men of the world it may appear a strange thing, how such a finite creature as man, can hold communion with the infinite God; and even to Christians themselves it may at times excite surprise: but the fact is, that no child can hold such friendly intercourse with its father; no friend can be on such terms of intimacy with his friend; no wife can open her heart with such freedom to her husband, as the soul, in the act of covenanting with its God: in what a holy, believing, confident, and yet humble manner, does it engage in the solemn work; now the soul is wrestling, pleading, interceding for grace; now it is humbled to the dust, like a condemned malefactor; now it pleads the merits of Christ, the oath and the covenant of God; and now, in faith, it says *amen*, I will for ever *be the Lord's*; and that with so much seriousness and solemnity, that were we to overhear the soul on such occasions, we could not but be filled with holy wonder—yes, were he who is engaged in this sacred transaction, to be a person, who in the presence of men, could only express himself with a

flammering tongue ; yet, when alone with his God, he would be found to excel in the most pathetic and energetic eloquence. But once more ;

8. Covenanting with God must be considered as an *act which extends*, without exception, to every part of the covenant ; for, if it be the covenant of God ; if Jehovah alone, who makes the various requisitions, and promises, that the covenant contains, no one may add to, nor take from it. Those who enter into covenant with God, must suffer themselves to be led in the way, and according to the will of God ; they may not cavil at any part of the covenant, but wholly yield to the sovereign pleasure of God, and only depend upon him for grace to enable them faithfully to discharge covenant obligations.

There are many sinners, who would be willing to come within the bonds of the covenant, if they were allowed to make such additions and alterations as their depraved minds would suggest ; but when it is proposed to them to covenant with God on his own terms, their language then is, “ *depart from us, we desire not the knowledge of thy ways ;*” but those on the other hand, who, with sincerity and uprightness of heart, would enter into the solemn contract, express themselves in this manner ; “ we object not to
 “ any thing which we find contained in the covenant ;
 “ we are well pleased with all its parts : the DUTIES
 “ which we are obliged to perform, are as precious
 “ and dear to us as the PROMISES ; the God of the
 “ covenant is infinitely wise, and best knows what
 “ is needful for us ; far be it from us, to prescribe to
 “ him who *knoweth our down-sitting and up-rising,*
 “ and whose all-seeing eye pervades universal space.
 “ —Lord, we approve of all the demands which

“ thou makest upon us ; we lay hold of thy promises ;
 “ we obligate ourselves to discharge all the duties
 “ which thou requirest us to observe ; not, Lord, be-
 “ cause we are able of ourselves to render perfect
 “ obedience ; but because we know we have to do
 “ with thee, a faithful, all-sufficient, and compassion-
 “ ate God, who hast promised to give us grace
 “ and strength, to enable us to be faithful : *We are*
 “ *thine, O David, we are on thy side, O son of Jesse ;*
 “ *we are the Lord’s, and subscribe with our hands unto*
 “ *the Lord.*”

This yielding consent to the covenant, by the believing soul, is, in the word of God, represented to us under a variety of names.

Sometimes it is called an OPENING the heart as a door to admit Jesus : Rev. iii. 20, *If any man open the door, I will come in to him.* And then the phrase, to covenant with God, implies, “ to give the Lord Jesus a cordial admission into our souls, that he may dwell in them as in a temple.”

Again, it is denominated, *a taking hold of Christ*, Isai. xxvii. 5, *Or let him take hold of my strength ;* and then to covenant with God, denotes, to act like a person in danger of drowning, who, in order to be rescued from his perilous situation, lays fast hold of the plank which his friend reaches out to him.

It is called a *kissing the Son*, Psalm ii. 12, *Kiss the Son ;* and then it implies that the soul, in the act of entering into covenant with God, acknowledges Jesus to be its king, submits to his authority, and is willing to obey his precepts.

It is also denominated, *a worshipping of God*, Ps. xlv. 11, *He is thy Lord, worship thou him*—and thus intimates to us, that they who covenant with God,

fall down before the Eternal, as one who is worthy of all love, and all adoration.

The Spirit represents it, also, as a *falling upon one's face*. Thus did Abraham, at the time that God covenanted with him, Gen. xvii. 17; and it shows us how cordially he approved of the covenant in all its parts. Or again, the same Spirit calls it a *laughing*, Gen. xvii. 17—where it is said of the same venerable patriarch, that HE LAUGHED at the promise God had then made to him: it was not the laugh of unbelief, as in the case of Sarah, but of satisfaction and admiration: his laughter spoke this language, “ Lord, dost thou make so many promises to me; I embrace them, with gladness of heart.” MOSES expresses this consent, Deut. xxvi. 17, by an *avouching the Lord to be our God*, and that we are his *people*, which, in other words, is to enter into covenant with him.

It is called a *declaration* or a *subscription* that we will *be the Lord's*, Isai. xlv. 5; to evidence not only that it is now our full purpose of heart to be on the Lord's side, but that, during life, we will persevere in the resolution, through grace, and make an irrevocable covenant with Jehovah.

It is also denominated a *swearing*; it is said of Judah, 2 Chron. xv. 12, 14, *That they entered into a covenant to seek the Lord God of their fathers, with all their heart, and with all their soul, and SWARE unto the Lord with a loud voice*.—This evidences both the stability of the covenant, and the sincerity of those who enter within its bonds.—As God on his side SWEARS, so in like manner does the soul, “ I have *sworn*, and will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments.”

It is, lastly, called, *covenanting itself*, Psalm l. 5, *Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made*

a covenant with me by sacrifice ; a mode of expression which is borrowed from a custom that obtained among the ancients, who, when they entered upon the solemnities of making a covenant, made an offering of beasts, and over the smoke of that offering, joined hands.—It is thus, the soul makes a covenant with God, over the meritorious sacrifice of the *Lamb of God*.

The FIFTH thing which we proposed to investigate, was ; “ WHEN MAY A SOUL BE CONSIDERED AS ENTERING *into covenant with God* ; ”

In reply, we observe, in GENERAL, that this takes place when the Holy Spirit commences his divine operations in the soul, and the very first principles of spiritual life are implanted ; for, although the soul be convinced of sin, and sorely distressed on account of it ; and although God be viewed as an incensed, holy, and righteous judge : and if it be asked, “ wilt thou continue in sin, and return again to the world, pursuing its follies, and observing its manners and customs ? ” its reply would be ; “ by no means, I would rather die than act such a part ; I would rather fall down before the Eternal’s throne, and seek his grace.”—Although the soul, at the time, may not know it, yet it actually does engage in the service of God, and renounces that of sin and the world.—Again, if we reflect how the soul is exercised with respect to that God, who hath thus convicted it ;—how it goes to him, pouring forth its petitions, lying as a humble suppliant before his throne ; confessing its sins ; seeking for grace and mercy ; declaring its supreme desires to be, that it might live before the Lord, become interested in his covenant, and be saved in the way which God hath appointed : must we not say of that soul, that it hath yielded a full

and cordial consent to the covenant ? Although it may not view this to be as a covenant transaction ; although, by unbelief, it may be oppressed by doubts, yet the fact is, that it approves of the covenant in all its parts, is satisfied with the gospel plan, and says AMEN to every proposition which God makes in the word of salvation.

But, if we consider the consent, which the soul yields to the covenant, to be “ a solemn and formal covenanting with God ;” then, there are many of God’s children, who have long been travelling the heavenly road ; yes, who have died, and gone to glory ; who, if asked, “ whether they have thus covenanted with God,” would reply—“ we have had our hearts often going out after God ; we have panted after him, as *the hart panteth after the water-brooks*, we have felt our souls inflamed with love divine ; but we are strangers to this FORMAL act.”—The reason of this may have been, because they knew not in what covenanting with God essentially consisted, or because, being dispirited by unbelief, they dared not to engage in so solemn a work ; thinking Jehovah to be too great and glorious a BEING, and themselves too unworthy.—And yet all the while they actually were standing in a covenant relation to God.

But then there are others again, who have been enabled, in the SOLEMN and FORMAL manner above mentioned, to bind themselves to the Lord ; these, seeing the God of the covenant, the Mediator of the covenant, and the covenant itself to be in every respect precious ; and that an interest in it is of the last importance, have been powerfully drawn and sweetly inclined to approve of the offers which God in the gospel has made to them, and have come under obligations the most solemn, in the strength of the

Eternal, to devote their lives to his service ; and we can easily conceive, that when a soul comes thus far, it may consider itself in the enjoyment of an unspeakable privilege ; for, when the first light, which once beamed with peculiar radiance upon the soul, becomes dim, and darkness in some measure succeeds, then, for the soul to reflect that the time was, when it solemnly covenanted with God, may prove a fruitful source of comfort and support ; at least, by means of a transaction so sacred, the soul will be kept from concluding immediately, that it is rejected of God ; and will have a foundation on which it may rest ; for, in the darkest hour, it will be enabled to say, “ Lord, “ thou art witness of all that hath passed between thee “ and my soul ; and now I commit myself into “ thy hands.”

To give some DIRECTIONS to those who are desirous of thus entering into covenant with God, will be attended to on some other occasion ; we shall only endeavour to make it appear, in addition to what has been said, “ that the subjects we have been discussing, are of the last importance to believers, as being excellent means to prepare their minds for a profitable, and comfortable approach to the table of the Lord.”

No SUBJECTS whatever can be more useful ; for only those receive saving advantage from the Holy Supper of the Lord, who are truly in covenant with God. It behoves us then to examine ourselves, and, in the presence of God, to inquire, “ whether we have thus cordially, freely, sincerely, and with a believing heart, given ourselves over to God, as our covenant God ; and whether we have now a desire, NOW, when the table of the Lord is about to be spread before us, and God is again reaching out to us his sceptre of mercy, to renew this covenant ? Can we

indeed say, when we leave our houses, “ Lord, we are willing also, to leave our old father’s house, our sins, Satan, and the world ?”

When we go up to the house of God, and are about to seat ourselves around the sacred board, “ Lord ! swiftly, with the feet of faith, we would run “ unto thee ;” when we reach out the hand to receive the signs, “ Lord, with desires most ardent, we receive thee by the hand of faith ;” when our eyes behold the emblems of the love of Jesus, “ Lord, thus the eye of faith is fixed upon thee, and upon thy perfect atonement ;” when we eat the bread and drink the wine, “ Lord, our souls desire to hold communion with Christ, and to be united to him in the most intimate manner.”—Now, beloved, if a soul be thus exercised, is it not evident, that the subject, on which we have been meditating, is calculated to animate and encourage us in our approaches to the table of the Lord ?

Yes, it is a subject peculiarly necessary for those, who indeed stand in a covenant relation to God, but who are in a BACKSLIDING state ; and thus are walking in darkness, and afraid that they have never entered into covenant with God at all ;—for, what will be likely to contribute more to their restoration, than an immediate return to him whom they have forsaken ? It is true, that God demands, when first his people come within the bonds of the covenant, that they be faithful ; and they on their part do engage that they will be for him, and not for another ; yet if afterwards they violate their engagement, and discover an unfaithful conduct, such is his faithfulness to them, that he will never forsake them ; but will, notwithstanding, manifest both compassion and love towards them :—his benevolence, love, and compassion are display-

ed on this wife; he addressees his covenant children, saying, “ I know that a man will not soon receive
 “ again the wife that has played the harlot; but *I*
 “ *will receive you though ye have played the harlot*
 “ *with many lovers.*—Return; I will receive you
 “ again in the arms of my love.”—Now would it not
 be more wise on your part, instantly to comply with
 these gracious proposals, than to reason thus; “ we
 “ have departed from God, and therefore we could
 “ never have been in covenant with him; we have no
 “ grace, no true religion.”

O BACKSLIDING children, what can afford you
 greater encouragement; what can animate you more,
 than to know that your covenant God is faithful; that
 he will have compassion on you;—he knows that his
 covenant people are but men, sinful men, naturally
 prone to depart from him; he knows that they have
 many internal and external enemies, who assault them
 continually, and that of themselves they are unable
 to make a stand against them; he knows that they
 have need of light, life, and strength; and all THESE
 things he promises to give, upon their return to him;
 yes, says the Eternal, “ Behold! the BLOOD of the cove-
 “ nant is shed for your cleansing, and in the sacrament
 “ I offer it to you.” Well, friends, is there any thing
 which can afford you greater encouragement, who are
 keeping back from God, by reason of doubts and fears,
 than to hear that there is such a glorious supper pre-
 pared for the SICK, the WOUNDED, the POOR, and
 the MISERABLE; at which there is not only meat
 and drink provided, but also medicine for your disea-
 ses, and a healing balm for your wounds? Keep
 not then away from this feast; but go forward, and
 run to meet your Saviour God, and say, “ Lord,
 “ once indeed we entered into covenant with thee;

“but, alas, we have played the harlot, and strayed from thee; because we are assured, from thine own word, that thou art full of compassion, we now come to thee, and will again renew former covenant engagement with thee, and give ourselves once more to thee.”

But we cannot close this lecture without a brief application of the subject to the different classes which compose this assembly.

And FIRST we address you, MISERABLE, IGNORANT, and CARELESS SINNERS, who are yet without the bonds of the covenant.

Unto you, we have a commission from the God of heaven, that from beginning to end, contains a WARRANT to INVITE you to enter into covenant with God: and to induce you the more readily to comply with this proposal, it is made in a variety of ways. Sometimes by INVITATIONS the most pressing; Isaiah xlv. 22, *Look unto me, and be ye saved!* sometimes by entreaty; 2 Cor. iv. 20, *We pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled unto God:* sometimes by way of ADVICE; Rev. iii. 17, *I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire:* sometimes by way of COMPLAINT; Ps. lxxxix. 13, *O, that my people had hearkened to me, and Israel had walked in my ways:* sometimes in an UPBRAIDING manner; John v. 40, *Ye will not come unto me, that ye might have life:* sometimes with the interposition of AN OATH; Eze. xxxiii. 11, *As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked.*—Sometimes this gospel offer is represented as a COMPULSION or urging of sinners, by motives the most powerful, to accept of it; Luke xiv. 23, *Compel them to come in.* And what are these compulsory motives, but those sincere declarations, which God freely makes to the sinner, in his

word, by which he is brought to see the folly and danger of trusting in former refuges, and to discover that safety and salvation are found alone beneath the shadow of Jesus' wings.

This day, sinners, I appear in your presence, as an ambassador of Jehovah; in his name, and by his authority, I make the same offers of grace and salvation to you. I stand in this house, dedicated to the great TRIUNE, to invite and to urge you, to submit to God in Christ, as your covenant God: behold the ETERNAL stands with open arms; his bowels are yearning over you: he cries; *How shall I give thee up Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee Israel? How shall I make thee as Admah? How shall I set thee as Zeboim?—Mine heart is turned within me; my repentings are kindled together,* Hosea xi. 8. What! is it possible that ye can any longer slight or refuse the kind, the endearing, and gracious invitations of that God, who addresses you, and says, “Sinners, “what benefits will you receive from the service of “sin and the world? *Look unto me;* in my service is “life; and salvation from sin and wrath, is the reward “of grace, which all my servants do now experience, “and shall enjoy for ever and ever.”

What is there, then, which prevents an acceptance of such offers of mercy? Every obstacle which you can possibly raise, is removed out of the way. The invitations are general, to all who live under the gospel; none are excepted; *whosoever will, may come, and take of the water of life freely.*—Or, will ye object, and say,

1. OUR SINS ARE TOO GREAT AND NUMEROUS. This is an objection which ought by no means to be raised; for, in the covenant of grace, God promises the pardon of ALL sins; yea, should an individual

be chargeable with ALL the sins of Adam's race, yet if he be enabled to confess them, mourn over them, repent of them, and with them to go to Jesus as his surety, God would graciously forgive, and blot them out.

2. WE HAVE LIVED TOO LONG IN THE WAYS OF SIN. This objection must cease, when it is recollected that God says, *I have stretched out my hands all the day*, not only in YOUTH, the MORNING; in MANHOOD, the NOON; but in OLD AGE, the EVENING of your lives. Rom. x. 21.

3. WE HAVE NOTHING WHICH CAN RENDER US ACCEPTABLE TO GOD.—This, certainly, can be no serious objection, if we reflect that God requires nothing more of us in his word, than an inclination, a willingness to receive every blessing from the hands of a covenant God. If sinners, though red with guilt, and black with filth, look unto God in Christ, the Scriptures assure us, that he will receive and embrace them in the arms of his love.

Should ye, after all this, perish, the blame will be attached to none but yourselves. Your ruin will be effected, not merely on account of the covenant of works having been broken in Adam; but for not having been willing to come to God; for having disregarded the offers of mercy, and treated his covenant with contempt. The devils sinned only ONCE; but ye, times and ways WITHOUT NUMBER—ye have sinned against the convictions of your own consciences, against the compassions of the Eternal, and against his gospel.—O! how dreadful, beyond expression dreadful, is the thought, that after having enjoyed such privileges, ye should be lost for ever.

Say not, We have been taught that WE CANNOT GIVE OURSELVES GRACE, AND ARE UNABLE TO

GO TO GOD.—It is true, sinners, ye are unable; but this is not the point of difficulty; your wills are rebellious; sin and the world have captivated your souls; ye will not part with your lusts; and therefore to you the service of God is hard, for it is incompatible with the service of sin, and whoever will serve God, must forsake the world. Your pleading inability, is only to excuse yourselves, and to cast the blame of your being in a graceless, and Christless state, upon God; for let me ask you, “Has a sense
“of your inability ever brought you so far as to seek
“at the hands of God, in secret, the Holy Spirit, effectually to shed his influences on your hearts?” Ye may, for a little while, endeavour to comfort yourselves, with thinking that ye want ability to enter into covenant with God, and that on this account ye are excused; but remember that ye will not dare to plead this on the day of judgment; but, conscious of your guilt, and convinced of the holiness and justice of God, ye will observe an awful silence; and, if ye approve not of the dread sentence of your judge, at least, ye must view it as just.

Sinners, AWAKE, and, viewing yourselves enchained by Satan, who has long tyrannized over your souls, SEEK to be delivered from the fetters which bind you. Let the *terror of the Lord*, or the delightful *invitations* of God in his word, move you to comply with the divine proposal which the gospel makes; persuade you earnestly to solicit that *repentance unto life* which is not to be *repented of*; and excite you to return to the Lord, and enter within the bonds of his covenant.

But we have still a word to address to such as are CONVINCED OF SIN, have seen their misery by nature, beheld the fulness and preciousness of the cove-

nant of grace, and even desire to be interested in its unspeakable blessings.

We exhort you—set not too high a value upon your first convictions, and rely not too much upon the emotions of a spiritual nature, which you may have felt, or may now feel; for, as we cannot immediately, at the commencement of the spiritual life, with precision distinguish whether those convictions and emotions are the effects of real life, or whether they be sparks which an awakened conscience may have produced, unless they are succeeded by an actual surrender of ourselves to God and his service, so ye can never attain to rest, until ye are brought to this point. Be not satisfied with being able to say, “We have been under convictions, and are so *still*:” for these are not the ground on which a sinner ought to rest, even though they may have induced him to forsake his more atrocious crimes, and to become externally moral and serious.—By convictions, ye may *escape the pollutions of the world*; but if ye have nothing more, *ye may again fall away*, Heb. vi. 4, 8. O! convinced sinners, let this text deeply impress your hearts, that ye may be prevailed upon to enter truly into covenant with God:—and although, at times, ye may experience some desire OF SALVATION through Christ, yet think not this to be all that is necessary; for, though your desires after SALVATION may be serious, yet they may not be those which our Redeemer has declared shall be satisfied, Matt. v. Hence, in concluding favourably with respect to your state and condition, merely from certain emotions and desires after salvation, you ought carefully to examine; whether those desires are such as are wrought in the heart by the spirit of grace.—If they be really such, you have not been satisfied

with mere desiring, but have cordially surrendered yourselves to God in Christ, and can appeal with confidence to him, to bear witness to your sincerity. And, even when ye are satisfied with respect to your sincerity in this matter, do not immediately conclude, that therefore it is certain that ye have actually entered into covenant with God. It may be so; but on the other hand it is possible that these exercises of your minds may be such as arise only from an enlightened judgment; for, when a person obtains a sight of SIN in all its hideous forms; of *God* and Jesus in their amiableness; of the covenant in all its fulness; and is led to see that there is no hope set before him, of arriving at eternal life and glory, but by Christ, and through the channel of the covenant of grace, will he not wish to be interested in this God, desire to call this Jesus his Redeemer, and be inclined to be put in possession of the benefits of this covenant? —Therefore examine yourselves, likewise, on the following point:—“Do all the PARTS of the covenant meet alike with your approbation; are the commands of the covenant as pleasing to you as the PROMISES? Such an investigation may perhaps alarm you; but if ye are within the covenant, that alarm will not injure you, but tend to excite you to go to the ETERNAL, to lay before him your doubts and fears, and to plead with him to search, to try you, and discover to you more and more what your state or condition is before God.

Therefore, convinced sinners, meditate much on the God, the Mediator, and all the parts of the covenant, and often ask yourselves before the Lord, “whether, of a truth, ye do desire to be interested in the covenant.” Perhaps a conduct like this might prove instrumental in inclining your souls actually

to enter within its bonds. In the mean time, proceed in the ways of religion : if the Lord hath begun in your hearts a good work, he will carry it on and perfect it, both to his glory, and your eternal salvation.

But, ye CHILDREN OF GOD, who are constantly in doubt whether ye have ever covenanted with God, unto you a word of encouragement and support must be addressed.

WHEREFORE DO YE DOUBT? Do not your fears arise from some one or other of the following causes?

1. FROM NOT HAVING JUST AND PROPER VIEWS OF GOD? Perhaps your conceptions of duty have been very incorrect : possibly your meditations of God's greatness, majesty, justice, holiness, and glory, have been pursued to an extreme, and your views of his grace and love, of his mercy and compassion, have been too contracted. Thus to contemplate God, necessarily will produce fears and doubts, and lead you to express yourselves in the following language of unbelief : " Can such poor, worthless, hell-deserving creatures ; creatures whose *breath is in their nostrils*, and who are formed from the dust, dare to enter into covenant with such an infinite and glorious Being? For us to give the hand to the Lord of heaven and earth, we conceive would be the highest presumption."—It is because ye reason thus, that ye remain at such a distance from him, and are afraid to commune with him. But, FEARFUL, DOUBTING SOULS, suffer us to remark, that whilst it is highly proper that you form to yourselves the highest conceptions of the great Eternal, and appear before him deeply impressed with a sense of his majesty ; whilst it becomes you to be clothed

with humility, and lowly to esteem yourselves; ye ought at the same time duly to estimate the love, mercy, and grace of God. It is your duty to make his loving kindness the frequent subject of your meditation, and constantly to consider that the compassion of Jehovah is such, that it requires nothing more at your hands, than that you come to him as poor, naked, and destitute of all things, and approach his throne *to seek for grace to help in every time of need*.—Can God possibly do more, on his part, to encourage your doubting, fearful hearts, than to make such representations of his character? Can ye, after all this, keep at a distance from him? Do ye still doubt the veracity of his declarations? This would evidence a disposition to treat with contempt the love of God, and reflect dishonour upon him: and, however you may conceive of it, such unbelief is a sin, greatly aggravated in the eye of him who is a *jealous* God.—And now is it yet the language of your hearts, “It would be our ardent desire to go to God, “and enter into his covenant, if we might presume “to do it.” We now declare unto you, that there is nothing on God’s part to prevent you; provided ye are sincerely willing, he is disposed to receive you in mercy.

2. But again, perhaps, you will say, “There are “still other difficulties in the way, which cause us to “doubt; WE FORESAW AND WERE AFRAID, BEFORE WE MADE A COVENANT WITH GOD, that “WE WOULD PROVE UNFAITHFUL TO OUR “COVENANT ENGAGEMENTS, AND DAILY SIN “AGAINST THE LORD; AND THE EVENT HAS “PROVED THAT OUR FEARS WERE NOT UN- “FOUNDED. How then can we, who have been so “unfaithful, again approach him?” But FEARFUL,

DOUBTING SOULS, let not even this prevent you from renewing your covenant engagements with God. We believe that it is with great reason ye complain of your unfaithfulness; but remember that God, even your covenant God, at the very time, also knew that ye would act this unfaithful part, and fall into a backsliding state; and yet such treatment he will bear from those who are within the bonds of the covenant. The covenant which he makes with you is the covenant OF GRACE; and therefore he gives you freedom to return again to him, and seek for reconciliation in the blood of the Mediator.

But do ye object, "That if we enter anew into such SOLEMN OBLIGATIONS to God, we shall again violate them, seeing we have to wrestle with a sinful and deceitful heart, are exposed to so many temptations from external objects, and have in ourselves no strength, no ability to resist our enemies." O beloved, Jehovah knows it too, that ye will again fall into sin; but the point in question is this, Is sin your burden; is it your sincere desire to be freed from it? If God were to ask you, "*What would ye that I should do unto you,*" would ye not reply, "Lord, we desire nothing more earnestly, than that sin be mortified in us; that we had more strength to oppose Satan and the world, and that we might serve thee with greater sincerity than ever we have done."

3. Do ye once more object, and say, "We cannot deny that we have cordially and willingly devoted ourselves to God, but still we are afraid that WE HAVE NOT BEEN SINCERE IN THIS TRANSACTION; for God has never yet EVIDENCED it to us by the SPECIAL WITNESS OF HIS SPIRIT." In answer to this, we observe,

a. That God is a SOVEREIGN, and, in dispensing

grace, acts ACCORDING TO HIS MERE GOOD PLEASURE. Would ye dictate and prescribe to the Almighty? Will ye be dissatisfied with Jehovah, because he is not pleased to make you experience grace in its highest degrees? Does not such a conduct diametrically oppose the requests which ye presented to the throne, when first ye came to the Lord? Ye then sought only the CRUMBS that fall from your Master's table.

b. Ye are SEEKING TO OBTAIN ASSURANCE IN THE WRONG WAY: your language is, "If our consent to the covenant had been genuine, God would, at some time or other, have given special evidences of it." Ye are expecting an extraordinary assurance, which would at once unfold to you your interest in God, as your covenant God: but were ye only to look back to the first operations of the Spirit upon your souls, ye would find abundant cause of gratitude. Would you not feel yourselves under inviolable obligations to thank the Lord, that he has excited in you an attention to his word; that he has caused you to see your sinful and wretched condition, and the fulness which there is in Jesus; that he has made your hearts to hunger and thirst after Christ; and that he has repeatedly inclined you to give yourselves away to Jesus, and to receive him as offered in the gospel? Now, recalling all these things to mind, must you not, with the Psalmist, exclaim, "*The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad.*"

c. Ye complain, even whilst ye ENJOY many SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS; because ye do not obtain just what ye particularly desire, and in the degree and manner that ye suppose to be the best; on this account your souls are dissatisfied.—The cause of a conduct so improper, will be exhibited in the next

lecture. At present we barely remark, that it is duty to be submissive to the divine dealings with your souls. Are ye called to walk in darkness? the God of the covenant, who is infinite in wisdom, knows what is for your best advantage; he leads you in ways dark and gloomy, to keep you humble, and to teach you to live by faith, and to continue to make him your refuge. Leave then all your concerns with your God; prescribe not to him the way or the manner in which he ought to conduct you; but rather say, "Lord, however dark and difficult the path may be, "in which thou leadeſt us, we lament not that we "have bidden an everlaſting adieu to ſin, to Satan, "to the world, and have choſen thee for our portion; "however it may fare with us in this life, we will, by "thy grace, reſt upon thy promiſes." This is living by faith, and thus to live, would make you aſhamed of living without reposing an entire confidence in your Saviour God; of living without cordially ſubmitting to the providential and gracious diſpenſations of thy Redeemer.

But, PEOPLE OF GOD, who are MORE ASSURED, and whole grounds of encouragement are ſtrong, and walk in the light of the Lord, ſeek ye to become ſtill more eſtabliſhed; and, to this end, daily examine yourſelves by the marks of grace, which are recorded in the word of God, and often reflect upon your firſt exerciſes; when, hungering and thiſtling after Chriſt and his righteouſneſs, ye importuned God to beſtow upon you his grace, and when the Spirit of the Lord, by his irrefiſtible power, overcame you, and your hearts in anguiſh cried, "Lord, although thou art exalted "*far above all principalities and powers*, and art in- "veſted with infinite majeſty and glory, yet, becauſe thou condeſcendeſt to regard worm Jacob, we, poor

“and naked as we are, come unto thee, and in thy strength, lay ourselves under inviolable obligations *“to walk before thee in the land of the living.”*”

But are ye indeed the covenant people of God? let it be your constant endeavour to be adorned more and more with every Christian grace, and to be more and more conformed to the image of Christ, that thus the world may see that ye belong to that people *whom the Lord has formed for himself, to show forth his praises.*

Those who have entered into covenant with God, are on the side of God: they come out boldly for the cause of God; they labour for God; they dare to speak in honour of his injured name, and their hearts are constantly devoted to his service. Let then your conduct be more and more like that of those who can call Jehovah their covenant God; be not ashamed of him; cleave to him; give him daily your hearts: renew your covenant with him; especially when seated at the table of the Lord, which ye are soon to approach: then, believers, will God not only HERE, manifest to you, that he is your covenant God; but, what is still more, he will put you into the FULL POSSESSION of salvation and eternal glory, when this song of praise, in honour of your faithful Redeemer, will, throughout the never-ending ages of eternity, burst from your grateful hearts,—IN HIM ALL THE PROMISES HAVE BEEN YEA AND AMEN.

THE END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

THE
PIOUS COMMUNICANT

ENCOURAGED,

AND DIRECTED IN WHAT MANNER HE MAY APPROACH

The Holy Supper of the Lord,

ACCEPTABLY TO GOD, AND PROFITABLY TO HIMSELF.

IN A SERIES OF LECTURES.



By the Rev. PETER IMMENS,

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THE
PIOUS COMMUNICANT.

Lecture IX.

ON COVENANTING WITH GOD.



ON a late occasion we addressed you on the interesting subject of the SINNER'S giving his cordial assent to the demands of God in the covenant. A subject of such vast importance could not be fully discussed in a single lecture: we have therefore been compelled to omit several points which, in our general division of the subject, were proposed to be illustrated. To those points we now solicit that attention which their magnitude demands.

I. How ought those to conduct themselves who are engaged in covenanting with God, so that they may best evince their sincerity, and obtain for their souls, divine consolation?

II. What SEASONS are the most proper for the solemn work of covenanting with God? Ought the soul only ONCE, or must it FREQUENTLY engage in it?—On what particular occasions should the covenant engagements of God's people be renewed?

III. What are the best MEANS of preserving a Christian's confidence of his interest in the covenant;

of recovering it; and when it may be in any measure lost?

IV. In what way can those objections be removed, which are raised by the fearful lambs of Christ, with respect to any sentiment which may have been advanced in the preceding, or which may be declared in this lecture?

V. We shall endeavour to make it appear, that to covenant with God, is the best preparation for a profitable approach to the Holy Supper of the Lord; and then,

VI. Make some improvement of the whole.

We are to shew, FIRST, "In what MANNER those who are engaged in covenanting with God, ought to conduct themselves so that they may obtain for their souls, divine consolation." But previously to doing this, we must premise the following things, viz.

1. That we would not be understood to condemn all Christians who may not have covenanted with God, precisely in the manner which will presently be pointed out; for the ways of God in the salvation of sinners, are free and sovereign; he brings not his children within the bonds of the covenant, in one and the same manner; many pious souls may be found, who, for want of a competent knowledge of divine truths, are unable thus to covenant with God; and yet have, perhaps, a thousand times cordially approved of the covenant, and taken God for their God; but, at the time, were ignorant that they were actually covenanting with him. We would therefore have it well understood, that it is not our object to produce doubts, and excite alarm in the minds of such persons; but rather to establish and confirm them in this, "that of a truth the Lord is their God."

2. That ALMOST CHRISTIANS, and TEMPORARY BELIEVERS must be on their guard against making an improper use of any thing we may advance ; and not suffer themselves to indulge a careless and secure temper. Persons of this description are apt, too suddenly, to conclude, that they have taken Jehovah for their covenant God. The covenant being represented as precious and glorious, their understanding and judgment become in a manner convinced ; yes, there may arise a species of desire in the soul, and the language of almost Christians may be, who would not be in covenant with God ? They may fancy that when they made their confession before the church, or at some other important period of their lives, they entered within its bonds ; but it is only fancy, they have never, in sincerity, consented with the heart to take the Lord for their God ; they have never approved of the covenant in all its parts ; they are strangers to the illuminations of the Spirit, by which alone the soul is drawn to embrace the covenant, as proposed by God in his word ; and their knowledge of the truth is merely speculative, for as yet they have never seen their real situation before God, nor beheld their character.

3. That the BLIND and CARELESS ought not to entertain LOW and MEAN CONCEPTIONS of the experimental truths, which will be exhibited in this lecture ; for we shall speak of things, *which the natural man understandeth not ; and which are foolishness unto him ;* of things which cannot be discovered in their true colours, but by the enlightening influences of the Holy Ghost.

Having made these observations, we proceed now to the subject under discussion, and shall attempt to shew how those, whose hearts are seriously disposed to

covenant with God, ought to conduct themselves, to the end that they may experience real satisfaction and comfort.

To do this, it will be proper to shew,

1. What PREPARATORY steps ought to be taken.
2. In what consists the ACT of covenanting with God.

3. What effects it must produce in the soul, in order that a person may be assured of his having actually engaged in this solemn and important work.

With respect to the FIRST point, we observe, that they who covenant with God must be careful,

1. That they be not TOO HASTY in the performance of so serious a business ; let it not, however, be understood that we would insinuate, in the least degree, that persons who are convinced of their misery, and have had a discovery made to them that the service of God is a delightful and reasonable service, can too quickly *give themselves over to the Lord*. No ; they may do this sincerely, even from the very first moment of their being made alive by the Spirit of God ; for the ways of the Lord, in the conversion of sinners, are deep, and very different ; sometimes God draws the soul to himself with *cords of love*, in a delightful evangelical manner, so that it sees such worthiness in God, and is convinced immediately that *his ways are ways of pleasantness, and all his paths are peace* ; the consequence of which is, that it does not hesitate for a moment, but instantly looks and turns unto the Lord. Now when the Lord leads persons in this way, they cannot possibly be too hasty, in surrendering themselves to the Lord ; by solemnly entering into covenant with him. But when we speak of being too HASTY, we would be understood only to mean, that it is improper to en-

gage in a transaction so solemn and of such magnitude, without much previous deliberation, or, having engaged in it, to conclude immediately that we are of a truth brought within the bonds of the covenant. By such a conduct we are in danger of being brought into a state of security, and of becoming in a degree indifferent and careless, with respect to holy walking with God. No, beloved, we *must count the cost* before we covenant with God; we must ask ourselves again and again, is it our sincere desire to be for ever devoted to the service of the ETERNAL? in this way we are likely to be established and confirmed in this, a point of the last importance, *that the work has been done in truth.*

2. But as persons ought not to be too forward, so neither should THEY DELAY TOO MUCH the important transaction of solemnly entering into covenant with God, as if by waiting or postponing the business, they would obtain those frames of heart which are necessary in order to their performance of it, in an acceptable manner. This is a mistake into which those are frequently led, who just commence living the life of faith; it springs from a self-righteous principle.—They who are governed by it, conceive that they have no liberty to approach unto God, until they find themselves in such a frame, and possess such a degree of contrition or faith, as they have proposed to themselves to be necessary; as soon as they shall attain this point, then say they, “we are prepared to covenant with the Lord:” hence it results that they continue long without the bonds of the covenant, for they have not power to bring themselves into such frames; and therefore, beloved, when the Spirit may have convinced you of sin and of righteousness, give your hand to the Lord; the disposi-

tions of mind which are necessary for covenanting acceptably to God, Jehovah himself must impart.

3. Those who would enter into covenant with God, ought to be CALM, TRANQUIL and composed: distracting cares of the world must not be allowed to draw off their minds, nor should unbelief be suffered to alarm or bring their souls to become the sport of doubts and fears; on the contrary, it behoves them to act a rational part when they covenant with God, and have the heart composed. We would not suggest the idea, that persons, who are brought into circumstances peculiarly distressing, who are filled with the extreme of anguish, by reason of sickness and the like, or who are in imminent danger, may not cast themselves upon the Lord, and in such seasons of distress, enter into covenant with God.—They may; and though, by reason of the pressure of existing circumstances, they may want a tranquil and composed mind; yet such covenanting may have the seal of divine approbation affixed to it.

4. Those who would enter into covenant with God, ought to seek to be prepared for engaging in so solemn a transaction, by retiring from the world, and by engaging in meditation and prayer alone; when God would enter into covenant with Abraham, *he brought him forth abroad*, Gen. xv. 5. When Isaac would hold converse with God, *he went into the field*, Gen. xxiv. 63. When God had made such great covenant promises unto David, as those recorded in 2 Sam. vii. 11, 17, it is said, that after Nathan left him, “*he went in and sat before the Lord*,” and, yielding a cordial consent to the covenant, said, “*Lord what is thy servant*,” verse 20. In secret, or when alone with God, the believers, with the boldness of a child that knows that he is loved by his father, can make all his

wants known to him, and has freedom to tell him where the wound bleeds, and where his burden presses most.

But, perhaps, some may ask, "Is it useful and necessary, when we covenant with God, to set apart a season for fasting? we reply, that in the word of God we meet with many instances of its having been done by the people of God. When Israel would enter into covenant with the Lord, after their return from the Babylonish captivity, they proclaimed a day for fasting and prayer; Ezra viii. 21; and, whenever it can be done, it is certainly proper, as it evidences a zeal and engagedness on our part, as also a determination, through grace, to be wholly the Lord's. But, as we do not find the word of God enjoining it, as that which is absolutely necessary, we would not declare that the soul cannot covenant with its God without previously setting apart a season for fasting and prayer.—There are some whose situation in life is such that it would be extremely difficult to observe such days;—others are so circumstanced, that they would meet with much opposition, if they were found devoting stated seasons to it—whilst others, again, having made but small attainments in Christian knowledge and experience, might not find themselves qualified to keep such a day as it ought to be kept:—Therefore, it must be left to the discretion of each Christian, whether it would be best for him to appoint a set time for fasting and prayer before he begin the great work of covenanting with God:—At the same time, however, it must be remarked, that the soul, when it engages in solemnly taking the Lord for its God, cannot but wrestle with him, in prayer, and express its dependance upon him for light and strength. Prayer is a mean the best calculated to wean the heart

from earth, and elevate the affections to heavenly objects.

5. Those that would enter into covenant with God, having in secret called upon the name of Jehovah, OUGHT SERIOUSLY TO INVESTIGATE ALL THE PARTS OF THE COVENANT: For it has been already shewn, that the consent which the soul yields is a rational one; in order to which, every thing belonging to the covenant ought to be distinctly known, and fully understood. When we meditate on the several parts of the covenant, we ought not simply to aim at informing the judgment, but at exciting love in the heart. For instance: Do we contemplate the GOD of THE COVENANT as one possessed of glorious perfections, and as one, who, although elevated above principalities and powers, and adored by seraphim and cherubim, yet is not ashamed to reveal himself as willing to become the God of sinners? Do we contemplate the MEDIATOR of the covenant in his fulness, amiableness, and preciousness; and, at the same time, view the HOLY SPIRIT as that divine being who sweetly influences, and powerfully operates upon the heart? Do we consider the persons who are INVITED, in the gospel, to COME within the bonds of the covenant, as creatures unable to extricate themselves from their misery, and so opposed to God and his covenant, that they spurn the idea of accepting its offers? Do we reflect on the DEMANDS which God makes in the covenant as being so reasonable, and so well calculated to meet the sinner's inability, and also on the precious PROMISES which the covenant contains, the promises of grace here, and of glory hereafter; and finally, that upon our CONSENTING to the covenant, with a BELIEVING heart, we may be bold to ask of God, agreeably to those promises,

all things which we need ? Is it possible that the soul can refrain from adoring and admiring a God so holy and gracious ? must it not glow with ardent affections towards him ? It is not an uncommon case for the children of God to commence examining the several parts of the covenant, under the experience of much barrenness and deadness of soul, and to end the scrutiny not only much animated, but enabled cordially to consent, and say AMEN to all its contents.

6. But, as those who covenant with God have obstacles frequently thrown into their way, they must be on their GUARD, lest the wiles of their spiritual enemies keep them from closing with the Lord as their God.—For this purpose,

A. Let not your souls be deterred from covenanting with God, because it is suggested, that HE IS A GOD OF INFINITE GLORY AND MAJESTY. There is, indeed, great reason why you should be humbled into the very dust in his presence, and cry out, “ Who am I, that I should be allowed to treat with such a glorious and holy being ? ” But, at the same time, it must be remembered, that Satan impresses the mind with a sense of the majesty of Deity, not to honour him, but to alarm and terrify you : therefore, when he assaults you in this way, reply to the tempter thus, “ It is a truth, the Eternal is infinitely exalted above all created intelligences, and seated on a throne of majesty ; yet, as a covenant God, he manifests himself as one who abounds with love, grace, and mercy. *He has proclaimed his name the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, abundant in goodness, shewing mercy unto thousands.* He has told us, that as a father he *pitieth them that fear him*, and, that like the tender mother, who cannot but have compassion on her sucking child, he cannot

“ but regard the children of his love ; that he will
“ not *break the bruised reed nor quench the smoking*
“ *flax*, and that *he will turn his hand upon the little*
“ *ones.*” Thus to oppose the arch fiend, will be a
mean of removing any fears which may have been raised
in your minds, by a view of God, as one glorious
in holiness, and of terrible majesty.

B. Be not discouraged from covenanting with God,
because you conceive yourselves too *sinful*, and too
UNWORTHY to engage in a transaction of such a
solemn nature. It is right to appear little in our
own eyes, and to be humbled when we come into
the presence of Jehovah ; but our sinfulness and
unworthiness ought not to keep us from God. There-
fore, say not, “ We dare not go unto God ; for our
“ sins have reached unto the very heavens, and are in
“ number as the sand on the sea-shore ;” but rather
confess before the Lord your sins, and, venturing into
his presence, let this be the language of your hearts,
“ Lord, we, who are the most unworthy of Adam’s
“ sinful race, come to thee, that we may be saved ;
“ not because we merit that salvation, but because thy
“ grace is free and sovereign.”

C. Let not your hearts be prevented from cove-
nanting with God, by the various ARTIFICES which
Satan may use for this purpose. He will not quietly
suffer souls to be wrested from his service ; but will
do all in his power to keep them bound in his chains,
and prevent them from going so far as to shake off
his authority, and surrender themselves wholly to God.
At one time he will suggest that your SINS ARE TOO
GREAT ; at another, that if you were to enter into
covenant with God, you would prove UNFAITHFUL
to him. But be not discouraged ; these are suggest-
ions of Satan : his raging thus is an evidence that

you are no longer his; and therefore, be bold to devote yourselves to the Lord, as your God, and portion.

D. Say not that, "to HOLD such an INTER-COURSE with the God of heaven and earth, is a WORK too great; say not, it is a thing impossible, that by such a simple act as that of yielding our consent to the covenant, we can be admitted within its bonds." It is granted that if we consider the matter as a transaction of creatures with the great Supreme, it is a work too great even for the most exalted seraph to engage in; but if we contemplate the character of God, it cannot be a work too great; for such is his goodness, that it will induce him to display such condescending grace. And is GOD thus disposed to deal with you, what should withhold you from that intercourse with him to which his word encourages you?

7. Those who enter into covenant with God, must do it depending on the divine and gracious INFLUENCES of the Holy Spirit. It is not enough that the understanding be in some degree illuminated, and that the judgment be rationally convinced, but the heart must be enlivened, and rendered active and zealous for God; it is however the Holy Ghost alone, who can produce life in the soul, and an engagedness in the service of Jehovah. If therefore you would approve yourselves sincere and earnest in this work, and rise superior to the accusations of your enemies; take the Spirit with you, covenanting with your God.

These things, we conceive, merit the particular attention of such as would covenant with God, and swear to be his for ever.

But, IN WHAT CONSISTS THE ACT OF COVE-

NANTING ITSELF? We believe, in reply to this question, that more is experienced than it is possible to express by words; especially when the soul is wafted along by the gales of the Spirit, and it is enabled to enter on the work with much light, animation, and engagedness. Yet, suffer us to remark, that the person who, agreeably to the preparation of heart just described, is about to yield his consent to the covenant, will HUMBLE himself before the Lord, and on this wise, address the Most High: “ Lord, I am now about to make the great choice, “ either of serving thee or the world; I will *no longer* “ *halt between two opinions*; already too long have I “ been indifferent, and given my heart away to sin, “ Satan, and the world; I have counted up the cost, “ and with care examined all the parts of that covenant, which thou hast proposed for my acceptance, “ and now, in thy presence, I solemnly renounce “ all my former pursuits: neither shall Satan or the “ world any more possess my heart, or keep me “ longer in their chains; and, Lord, I further profess “ to choose thee for my God, and cordially to consent to all that the covenant proposes. Dost thou “ require that I *deny myself, take up my cross*, and “ follow Jesus? be it so, I am perfectly satisfied; I “ wish to be saved in no other way but in that by “ which thou mayest be glorified. Wilt thou then, “ O God, who art so glorious a being, become my “ God? Art thou willing to save a wretch like me? “ Amen, lo, I am here, I will be for ever thine. “ And this I declare, not only with my lips, but “ with my heart. Unto thee I give myself, body, “ soul, and all that I am and have,—I do it with the “ deepest HUMILITY; for thou art the *High* and “ *Holy* One, who inhabitest eternity, and I a poor

“unworthy creature, and worm of the dust. I do
“it also IN FAITH, with my eye directed to the
“Lord Jesus alone, and to his one sacrifice made
“upon the cross; which is the only ground of my
“confidence. Yes, Lord,—I do it, SENSIBLE of
“my INABILITY; I am aware, that if I depended
“on myself, or upon any strength of my own, I
“should not continue faithful to thee one moment:
“but I expect, from the promises of the covenant,
“that all necessary grace will be imparted: and,
“therefore, O Triune God, I take thee for the por-
“tion of my soul,—thee, FATHER, for my Father,—
“thee, BLESSED JESUS, for my Redeemer and my
“Saviour, for my Prophet, Priest, and King, to be
“taught, conducted, and governed by thee; and
“thee, God the HOLY GHOST, for my Counsellor,
“Guide, and Comforter. And all this I do with
“full consent of heart, and sincerity of soul: for unto
“me thou art an object so glorious and amiable, that
“all my affections centre in thee alone.” Lan-
guage like this in some measure expresses the exer-
cises of the soul in the act of covenanting with God.
Such are its views, and so lost is it in admiration,
that words cannot fully describe them. It is con-
strained to cry out with David, 2 Sam. vii. 20, *Is
this the manner of man, O Lord God, and what can
David say more?* For thou, O Lord God, knowest
thy servant. Do any now enquire what posture of
body is most proper, when a person is engaged
in covenanting with God? we would reply, on this
point positive directions cannot be given. How-
ever, we remark that that position is most suitable,
which best expresses our reverence and respect for
God. On examining the sacred Scriptures, we
find, that the people of God, when in the act of

covenanting, have used different postures. When Israel covenanted with God, *they stood before the Lord*, Neh. ix. 2. Abraham *fell upon his face*, or kneeled, Gen. xvii. 17. Is it done in a standing posture? it intimates our willingness and readiness, as servants, to obey the precepts of the Lord. Is it done kneeling? it shews our humility, as also that we are encouraged to touch the sceptre of grace presented to us. In covenanting with God, the VOICE is sometimes heard. Thus, Israel is said to have used *a loud voice*, 2 Chron. xv. 14. This they did to express their earnestness and sincerity. Sometimes we *subscribe with the hand to the Lord*, Isai. xlv. 5; by which act we declare, that the contract is irrevocable by us. Sometimes the soul, in covenanting, binds itself by the solemnity of an OATH. Does God, says the soul, whose nature is unchangeable, whom I am bound to believe on his mere declaration, to display *the immutability of his counsel, confirm it with an oath*? Heb. vi. 17,—I too will swear, that *I will keep* his righteous statutes. Hence the act of covenanting with God is called a *yielding of ourselves unto the Lord*, 2 Chron. xxx. 8. As if the Lord, on his part, said, “I offer thee my hand; lay hold of it with confidence:”—At first, filled with astonishment, and lost in admiration, the soul asks, “Is it possible that I, who am polluted, vile, and sinful, in the highest degree, may join hands with the Immaculate and infinitely holy God?”—but immediately it remembers the one sacrifice made by Jesus on the cross; and the Spirit at the same time uniting the soul to God, by the bonds of faith and love,—it ceases to refuse, and yields to the gracious proposal. Is not this what David terms *making a covenant with sacrifice*? Psalm l. 5.

Now, has any person, in this or in a similar manner, concluded a covenant transaction with God? certain effects are necessarily produced, by which he is enabled to satisfy himself that he hath really covenanted with God. For instance: after the solemn business is completed, does not the soul experience more light, and a stronger confidence; a joy unspeakable, and an inward satisfaction in all the ways of God? Is it not excited to praise, admire, and adore God, for having condescended to covenant with such a *worm* Jacob? Does not such a view of God's condescension produce humility of heart, and make the soul appear so little in its own eyes, that with Abraham it must exclaim, Gen. xviii. 27, *Who am I, that I, who am but dust and ashes, have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord?*

In a word, when the soul has been engaged in covenanting with God, will there not be desires excited to have sin mortified, to be more holy, and to live more to the glory of God. What inference must the soul now deduce from all these experiences, but that it hath covenanted with the Lord, not merely in form, but with sincerity of heart, and that God himself hath set his seal of approbation to the solemn work, and engaged to be our God?

But it is sometimes the case, that the soul is filled with fears; and wanting confidence, it dares not proceed to such a length as to take Jehovah for its covenant God. It has, indeed, ardent desires after him: it cordially acquiesces in his dispensations: it can say, "Lord, I would rather die at the feet of Jesus, than return to the service of sin, Satan, or the world."—And does not all this amount to an actual surrender of the soul to God? Though it cannot, at the time, view it as such, yet, when it shall

please the Lord to enlighten the understanding more, to make the opposition of the enemy in some measure to cease, and enable it to survey its former exercises; its language then will be, "Are these the exercises of those who yield consent to the covenant? I have not the least remaining doubt but I have done it more than once." Then it experiences that God is *good and gracious*; and ascertains the import of the expression, *I am your God*. Thus,

Agreeably to the first thing proposed, we have seen the MANNER in which a soul ought to conduct itself, when in the act of covenanting with Jehovah.

The SECOND point to be discussed was, What is the most suitable time for such a transaction? Ought it to be done but *once*, or must the Christian frequently engage in it? And if so, on what particular occasions ought the covenant engagements of God's people to be renewed?

1. As for the TIME when the soul should enter into this covenant, it has already been remarked, that it neither ought to be done too hastily, nor should it be too long delayed. The time cannot be precisely limited. It can only be observed, that if, Christian, thou art made rightly to know thyself;—if thou dost discover, that every thing proposed by God in the covenant, is worthy of thy love and acceptance;—and if thy soul be inclined by the Spirit of God to take the Lord for thy God:—certainly then it becomes thee to enter within the bonds of the covenant.

2. Do any enquire, Whether a person must *once* only, or repeatedly engage in covenanting with God?—I answer, It is a fact, that, upon having once yielded a cordial assent to all that the covenant proposes, we must always continue to be the cove-

nant people of God; for the *gifts and calling* of God are without repentance. But still, in order to our living comfortably, and being animated on the way, we must not simply once choose the Lord for our covenant God, but the solemn act must be repeated. We cannot too frequently renew our engagements to be the Lord's for ever.

It often occurs, that the Christian doubts of his having ACTUALLY entered into covenant with God. But nothing can better remove his doubts, and assure him of his having done it in truth, than to go immediately to the Lord, and say, "Lord, I am still willing to take thee for my covenant God, and if I have never before, I will now do it in the sincerity of my heart."

Again, There are seasons when, overtaken by temptations, he FALLS into sin, becomes unfaithful to his God, and consequently loses his wonted confidence in him. Shall he rise again, and be restored to his former situation? let him directly go to the Lord, and again devote himself to his service. In this way the Eternal is glorified, and the intentions of the enemy defeated.

But the conduct of God himself will be the best guide to us in this point. He did not content himself with once making a gracious covenant with the believing patriarchs, but often repeated it. First, he covenanted with Adam after his fall, and then with Noah, both before and after the flood. He frequently made a covenant with Abraham, and afterwards renewed the same with Isaac and Jacob, with David and other saints. But why did God so frequently covenant with his people, if not to teach them that he was sincere in the declarations which he had made, and to remove from their minds every cause of un-

belief and fear. Now, has God, who is unchangeable in his nature, and under no necessity of making a covenant with his people, repeatedly renewed his engagements with them, to manifest his earnestness and faithfulness, and to remove all doubts on their part? is it not reasonable that we, who are sinful and unfaithful creatures, and inclined to err daily, should often renew those solemn engagements which we once have entered into with him, and thus evidence to the Lord, that we purpose, through grace, to cleave to him for ever.

3. On what particular occasions, ought God's people to renew their covenant?

A. CHILDREN OF GOD, you cannot do it TOO FREQUENTLY, though it should be done daily; yea, though every time you approach unto God in prayer, you should say, "Lord, thou art the object we constantly seek: thee we choose for our portion: in thee all our affections are placed."

B. It ought, especially, to be done AT TIMES WHEN THE LIGHT OF GOD'S GRACE shines with unusual splendour upon the soul,—when God animates and enlivens the heart, either in secret or under the ministrations of his word. Such seasons must not be unimproved. Then the hand must be again given to the Lord:—then you should of anew devote yourselves to his service. Thus your souls would become established more and more in the ways of Christianity, and you learn to live by faith: For if afterwards it should please God to withhold his grace, and cause you to experience some degrees of darkness, you might comfort your hearts, and say, "We are no strangers to God. At such a time, on such a season, we are certain we gave ourselves to the Lord, and did it uprightly."

C. The people of God ought to renew their covenant with him on all *solemn* occasions, such as days set apart for fasting and prayer, and for commemorating the dying love of Christ in the sacrament of the supper. At such seasons we are especially called to engage in an examination of the state of our hearts, and of our conduct before the Lord. Such an investigation will lead us to discover that we have offended him, times and ways without number. Now, what can be more to our advantage and comfort, than to return unto God, with confession of sin and contrition of heart, and, in his strength, again pledge ourselves to be true to him. The Scriptures expressly mention that the saints observed days of fasting and prayer, on which they were to covenant with God.

D. The people of God are called to renew their covenant, when they enter upon ARDUOUS and IMPORTANT offices, or are called in providence to change their situation in life. At such seasons they stand in need of much grace, in order that they may continue faithful to their covenant engagements: and therefore, previous to entering upon such undertakings, it behoves them solemnly to approach God, and say, " Lord, we undertake this work, not with
" a view to break our covenant engagements with
" thee, nor in any respect to weaken them. And
" to evidence this, we humble ourselves before thee,
" and look to thee as our covenant God, for all
" needful grace to enable us faithfully to discharge the
" duties of our station."

E. Christians must renew their covenant when they FALL into any grievous sins; then is the time to set apart a day for fasting and prayer. When David had committed those gross sins, mentioned in the

fifty-first Psalm, he was deprived of the joy of God's salvation, and it was never restored to him till he was brought to confess them; to seek the face and favour of God; and to surrender himself again to the Lord. On such occasions it is, believers, that you ought, with shame and confusion of face, to confess your transgressions, to take refuge in the blood of Christ, and bind yourselves afresh to the Lord.

F. The covenant must be renewed when you are brought into extraordinary difficulties, when afflictions oppress you, or when you are brought to a bed of sickness, or to a dying hour. It is then a fit season to give your hearts to God, to resolve that whatever may befall you, you will cleave to the Lord, and to take consolation from this, that *though your house be not so with God, yet he hath made with you an everlasting covenant, well ordered in all things and sure, and which must be all your salvation and all your desire.*

The THIRD subject which comes under consideration, is, "what are the best means of preserving a Christian's confidence of his interest in the covenant; and of recovering it, when it may be in any measure lost."

I. TO PRESERVE the confidence of faith, God's covenant people are to endeavour, through grace, to discharge the following duties, viz.

A. Endeavour to keep constantly alive the principle of LOVE to God in Christ: let your esteem of him, and your holy affections be expressed by a frequent declaration of your regard for him; of your strong desires after him, and of your fixed purpose of cleaving to him: there is nothing with which the Lord Jesus is more delighted, than with his people's affection towards him; hence we find these extraor-

dinary expressions in the Canticles, "*thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes*, Songs, iv. 9: *Turn away thine eyes from me, for they have overcome me*, Chap. vi. 5: *My desire is towards thee*." As love is said to be the whetstone which sharpens love, so the Lord Jesus promises, John xiv. 23, "*If a man love me, my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him*:" and again, Prov. viii. 17, "*I love them that love me*." Are there so many great and precious promises to those who love the Lord? what can tend more to preserve our friendship and intimacy with God, than the exercise of love to him?—what is it that gives the highest perfection to conjugal happiness? is it not mutual love? and what unites the soul in the closest bands to God, and creates a holy boldness in his presence? it is love ascending like incense towards heaven, and reciprocated by the God of love. But if we would expect that our love should meet with a gracious return, we must be careful that it be an UNDIVIDED love, excluding self-love and the love of the creature; for God is a jealous God, and will have the whole heart.

B. To preserve the confidence of faith, it is further necessary, that the people of God become intimately acquainted with him; "*acquaint thyself with God, and be at peace*," Job. xxii. 21. We must meditate much upon the divine perfections, especially those which are displayed in the covenant of grace; we must acquaint ourselves with him, by keeping up a constant intercourse with him, by the exercise of faith; by earnest prayer; by freely consulting with him, and by speaking of him to others. In a word, we acquaint ourselves with God, by conversing with him in secret, and by praising him in *psalms, hymns,*

and spiritual songs. By such an intercourse with him, we shall obtain the character given to Noah in the sixth of Genesis, "*That he walked with God.*" And then we may expect that, according to his gracious word, he will reveal his *secret* to us: that when we *cast our burdens* upon him, he *will sustain us*, and that he *will give us the desires of our hearts.*

C. In order to maintain a well-grounded confidence respecting our covenant relation to God, we must be CIRCUMSPECT in our conduct, as it respects our neighbour and ourselves, as well as God; for, when we become unwatchful over ourselves, neglect our duty towards our neighbour, or indulge in any sin, we may expect that God will have a *controversy with us*, and *hide his face from us.* We shall then sit in darkness, and be unable to approach with boldness to the throne of grace; and thus we shall be taught by sad experience, that a God of spotless purity will be served in a holy manner, and that it is *an evil thing and bitter, to sin against him.*

D. But however watchful we may be, we must remember that we are but men, and sinful men, prone to stumble and fall. In order, therefore, that the ground of our confidence may not be removed, we must suffer no sin to remain UNCONFESED and unrepented of. When we fall, we must rise and return to God, and seek for pardon through the blood of Christ, agreeably to the encouragement and exhortation of the Apostle, 1 John ii. 1, *My little children, these things I write unto you, that ye sin not; and if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, who is the propitiation for our sins.* Though we depart from God, yet if we return unto him with humble confession of our sin, and faith in the Mediator, he will yet *rejoice over us to do us good; his kind-*

ness shall not depart from us, nor shall the covenant of his peace be removed.—When a child has committed a fault, if he continues obstinate, and disobedient, he meets the displeasure of his father; but if he submits to his authority, with suitable contrition, the compassionate father forgives him, and receives him to his favour; just so our heavenly Father deals with his children. When they transgress, and continue insensible of the offence, they may expect his frowns, or his chastizing rod; but if they return to him with humble confession of their sins, his language towards them is, “*As a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him,*” Ps. ciii. 13.

E. That the people of God may preserve the confidence of faith, nothing is more useful than a FREQUENT, a DAILY RENEWAL of the covenant. Of this we have already spoken at some length; but do any inquire whether the covenant must in the same solemn manner be renewed? we answer that it is not necessary that it be always done with the same formality; yet we ought every day, in secret, to present ourselves before God, professing ourselves to be his, declaring our resolution to cleave to him, and supplicating him, to enable us to be faithful to all our covenant engagements.

F. Would we preserve our confidence towards God? we must be CLOTHED WITH HUMILITY. The consideration of the august and awful majesty of God, should excite in us the most profound reverence, and a sense of our meanness should lead us to appear before him with the deepest abasement and lowliness of mind. Whilst nothing is more offensive than pride, nothing is more pleasing to him than humility. Therefore, it is that *he resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble,* James iv. 6.

2. But if so much is necessary in order to preserve the confidence of the people of God, it follows that, though the covenant be unchangeable in its nature, yet that confidence may in a measure be lost, and the peace and joy of the believer be interrupted, by reason of God's hiding his face, and withholding the manifestations of his love. Is it asked why are God's children deprived of the light of their Father's countenance? for this we may assign a variety of reasons, arising partly from God, and partly from believers themselves.

A. God does this,

a. To shew that he is a SOVEREIGN God; that from him cometh every good and perfect gift. The believer's confidence being weakened is not always the consequence of some particular offence. God said of Job that *Satan moved him to destroy him without a cause*; that is, that he was not chargeable with any remarkable sin, which should occasion his extraordinary afflictions.

b. To TRY them, and to CALL them to the more vigorous exercise of grace; to strengthen their faith, and to increase their holy desires; to make them sensible of their own insufficiency, and lead them to cry more fervently to their God.

c. To teach them that this world is not the place of their rest; that here their most delightful exercises and experiences are transient, and that it is only at God's right hand above that they may expect to receive *fulness of joy, and pleasures for evermore*.

d. To make them PRIZE his grace, and set a higher value on the blessings of the covenant. These are always rendered far more precious to their souls, when they enjoy them after having drunken largely of the bitter cup of affliction.

c. To display his amazing POWER and GOODNESS. Does the Eternal not only preserve them in the enjoyment of the spiritual life, but restore them again to their former strength, and cause them afterwards to triumph over Satan, and thus revive *the hearts of the contrite ones*. He displays his unbounded benevolence and love, and exhibits power which infinitely transcends the energies of creatures the most exalted in the scale of beings.

B. The REASONS of God's dealing thus with his people are not found only on his side, but also on the part of BELIEVERS; and these respect either the time PAST or the FUTURE.

With respect to the time PAST, we observe that God withholds the light of his countenance;

a. When the children of his love have committed great and aggravated sins. The holiness of his nature, in such case, requires that they should be chastized; be made to feel the rod; cease to enjoy, at least for a season, their wonted intercourse with him; and thus learn that God cannot have fellowship with those who work iniquity. David experienced this, though a man after God's own heart; he no sooner fell into sin, than he lost the *joys of his salvation*, Ps. li. 14.

b. When abusing the goodness of God, they treat his DIVINE MAJESTY with little reverence and respect, or when through sloth, and inattention, they do not cherish those blessed experiences which they have had of his grace and love. The spouse laid herself on the bed of sloth, and suffered the bridegroom to stand knocking without. However, to her great surprise, she soon found that *her* beloved had withdrawn himself. Songs v. 2, 7.

c. When they CONFIDE in an arm of flesh, or

lean upon their own arm to bring salvation, saying with Peter, Matt. xxvi. 33, *Though all men should be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended.*

d. When SPIRITUAL PRIDE, on account of any gifts or qualifications, arise in his people. Then God manifests to them his divine displeasure, and by withdrawing his favours, evidences that *he resisteth the proud*, 1 Pet. v. 5.

e. When they are not sufficiently WEANED from the things of this world. It is found frequently to be the case at conversion, when God's people are made first to enjoy communion with him, that they look with a comparative degree of contempt on things below, and have their hearts loosed from them. But afterwards, when their first ardour has abated, and they have been longer on the way, their former attachments, sometimes engross too much of their attention, and they display too great a conformity to the world. Hence God is displeased, and Jesus, the great head of the covenant, will upbraid them, as he did the angel of the church of Ephesus, Rev. ii. 5, saying, "*I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.*"

C. For, the above reasons arising from the past misconduct of the people of God, Jehovah hides his face from them; but there are others which respect the FUTURE, why he deals thus with them.

a. That he may TRY their FAITH. By means of withholding his spiritual favours, God discovers whether, though they do not *taste and see*, yet will believe his testimony of himself, that *he is good*; and thus prove that they love God for what he is in himself, as well as for what he has been unto them.

b. That he may awaken them to fervency in prayer.

Christians often become formal and languid in the discharge of this duty. To animate them, and to make them wrestle with him, he hides his smiling face from them. This was the effect which afflictions produced upon HEMAN, Ps. lxxxviii. 1, *O Lord God of my salvation, I have cried day and night before thee.* When the bridegroom, who had long been standing and knocking, had at length retired, the spouse, made sensible of her need of his presence, awakes from her slumbers, seeks him in the streets, and in the more retired parts of the city, Songs vi. 6, 7.

c. That he may TEACH them true wisdom; for, by such dispensations, God's children are induced to investigate with care and attention his dealings with them.

d. That when God shall afterwards visit them again with salvation, they may be more careful to preserve his favour. Such was the effect it produced on the mind of the spouse; when *she found her beloved, she held him fast, and would not let him go.*

3. But when the intimate fellowship which once existed between God and his people, appears for the present interrupted, and the light of his countenance is concealed from their view, what is to be done, in order that their former intimacy and confidence may be RESTORED?

A. They must endeavour to find out the CAUSE which has produced the evil, saying with Job, chap. x. 2, *Shew me wherefore thou contendest with me.*

B. The cause being discovered, it becomes them to be ASHAMED of their sins, to confess them, and with humility to return to the Lord their God, saying with David, 2 Sam. xxiv. 10, *I have sinned greatly, I have done very foolishly.*

C. They ought to be much in PRAYER, that God

would not deal with them as strangers; but, as children of the covenant, *uphold them by his free Spirit.*— With the Psalmist they should plead, Ps. cxix. 176, *I have gone astray like a lost sheep, seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments.*

D. They ought, under such circumstances, to RENEW, with much seriousness, their former covenant transactions, and again declare before him, that they *will be the Lord's*. Until this is done, they cannot reasonably expect a return of the joys and delights which they experienced when the Lord visited their souls with the manifestations of his love.

E. They ought, with patience, to WAIT for the time which God hath set to be gracious to them, neither neglecting duty, or wishing to prescribe bounds or limits to the Lord.

The FOURTH thing proposed was to attempt a removal of *some of the objections* and difficulties which might be raised, in consequence of what has been exhibited in this and in the preceding lecture.

1. It may be asked by some “what DIFFERENCE exists between a merely RATIONAL assent to the covenant, and that which is CORDIAL and SAVING? for mention has more than once been made of an ASSENT which is speculative in its nature, and of one in which the whole heart is engaged.

This question is indeed a momentous and important one, and ought to be answered with great circumspection and care, lest those who are only ALMOST *Christians* may continue at ease with respect to their state, and confide that all is well with him, when they have not the least foundation for their hope,—for every person who lives under the dispensation of grace and salvation, who is not altogether left to himself, who is moral in his deportment, and has

experienced even slight conviction of sin, but will, when he is told of this covenant, express his approbation of it, and say, "Who would not yield an assent to such gracious proposals?—As for me, I will cordially approve of, and set my seal to them." He may even go so far as to persuade himself that he has already done it, because of the speculative view he may have taken of it; but though he may have gone thus far, yet he was not sincere,—the work has not been done in truth; for, as yet, his heart is not divested of its love of sin,—he has not yet come to a real knowledge of himself,—he has never been made to abandon his self-righteous principles. All this is manifest from his walk and conversation, which is not heavenly, but earthly, and too much assimilated to that of natural men: consequently his boasted assent was only that of the understanding and fancy. A person of this description may indeed converse on the essential doctrines of religion; but never feel the influence of them upon his heart.

It is however very different with respect to those who have CORDIALLY consented to the covenant and its several parts. If, like ALMOST Christians, they have speculatively surveyed the covenant on all sides, they have likewise the knowledge which is communicated by the Holy Ghost, which is experimental and sanctifying. They have been sweetly drawn to yield their consent, by the force which the doctrines exhibited in the covenant have had upon their souls. Yes they must, they will exclaim, "We well know how to distinguish between that period of our lives, when we were spiritually dead, and inactive for God, and when we became awakened into a holy engagedness for his service: we well remember the time when, attending on the public

“and private duties of religion, we felt no soft
“affections move, and anxiously waited for the con-
“clusion of such performances, and felt no other-
“wise concerned, with respect to the covenant, its
“duties and promises, than men in general. But
“then, again, we know that there have been seasons
“in our lives, when our hearts were so exercised,
“animated, and warmed, with love to the God of
“the covenant, that we were made perfectly willing
“and ready to live unto him, and to say with
“our whole souls, Away, *sin, world, Satan*; we
“renounce for ever your service; we are for God,
“and for him only we do cordially, wholly, of our
“own free will, choose him for our God, guide, and
“portion. We are sensible that in all this we are not
“led away by fanciful or enthusiastick notions; for
“we feel every day more and more disposed to live
“to God, and deport ourselves as those who are in
“covenant with him.” But “Ah!” says the distressed
and depressed soul, “this is the very point which
“causes my distress, and produces my fears. Could
“I discover any thing in my walk and conversation
“correspondent to that now mentioned, I could then
“conclude favourably concerning myself: but this
“seems not to be the case. How sinful is my life!
“what spots are in my garment! how seldom do I,
“in any respect, walk in the ways which Jehovah
“has set me! and with what numberless corruptions
“have I daily to struggle! These things shake my
“confidence; nay seem wholly to destroy it.”

To persons thus exercised we beg leave to observe,
that you must not decide, with respect to your state,
merely from the holiness of your walk, and pre-
eminent excellency of your deportment; for, then,
instead of coming to a favourable determination, you

would find abundant ground of complaining, and of distrusting your interest in the covenant. But suffer me to ask you, whether the remains of sin in you, your untender carriage before the world, on some occasions, and your deficiencies in duty, are not a cause of distress to your souls? Can you avoid making the declaration before God, that nothing would afford you greater satisfaction, and meet more with the ardent desires of your souls, than to be enabled to live more agreeably to the will of God,—to have sin daily more and more mortified, and to make more suitable returns for that grace which he has imparted to you?—Such desires evidence, with certainty, your sincerity, and shew that you have received *the truth in the love of it*.—But,

2. It may be asked, Whence is it that, though at the time we FIRST made a covenant with the Lord, or when we AFTERWARDS renewed it, we were much in the exercise of faith,—had our hearts deeply affected,—and experienced a high degree of light and life; yet we are NOW overwhelmed with such darkness, that we dare not believe that we ever did sincerely and cordially come within the bonds of the covenant?

But, CHILDREN of God? for your encouragement we remark, that, in order to judge of your sincerity, all your exercises must be beheld by the light with which the Holy Spirit is pleased to irradiate the soul. Now there are times when this light is withheld from you: it naturally results that midnight gloom and darkness, consequent upon sin and a careless walk towards the God of the covenant, overspread the soul; and this may proceed to such lengths, that, instead of contemplating its former experiences, and deriving support from them, it cannot meditate upon them; but doubts and fears arise.

Do you then inquire, When darkness obtains to such a degree in the soul, whether we may bring former experiences in review, as a ground on which we may rest? This depends entirely on the effects which proceed from so doing.—If to rest on former experiences, makes us careless and unconcerned, with respect to our walk and conversation, and causes us to become indifferent, and ready to say, We are sensible of what hath passed between God and our souls; that we have devoted ourselves to his service; and that, though we may have been unfaithful, yet he is faithful; and, though we may want ardour, zeal, and activity, in promoting the cause of Christ, the covenant is unchangeable.—God is indeed FAITHFUL; but you must also be true to your solemn engagements, and exercise holy love towards him. If you wholly fail in these respects, you can with no propriety build your hope on former experiences. Yet it may sometimes be highly ADVANTAGEOUS to reflect upon what you may have experienced in times past.

A. When former experiences produce HUMILITY, and lead you, in secret, to ask Jehovah, saying, Lord, did we not, at such a period, obligate ourselves to be thine for ever,—and, in thy presence, resolve, through grace, never to forsake thy service? and didst thou not, at that time, say to us, “*I have loved you with an everlasting love*; I have admitted you within the bonds of my covenant?”—When the soul looks back on experiences and occurrences like these,—and reflects how little agreement there is between former engagements and its present conduct,—between God’s manifestation of love to it, and its return of love to him;—if then pride falls, and shame covers the face; this is both pleasing to God, and beneficial to the Christian.

B. Former experiences are useful to ENCOURAGE and bear up your souls, when the Lord conceals from you the light of his countenance. When you look back, and duly consider how lively your exercises once were; with what fervour you approached the throne of grace; how unreservedly you surrendered yourselves to the Lord Jesus; and how solemnly you engaged to be followers of him, as the great captain of your salvation; the natural conclusion that must be drawn from all these experiences is, that they sprung not from nature, but from grace: than which reflexion, nothing can more animate the souls of the distressed and doubting children of the covenant.

C. Past experiences are especially to be considered as useful, when they serve to AWAKEN you to WALK more tenderly in the presence of God, even when he may be hiding his face from you; insomuch that you can say, Lord, although now we are sensible that thou art withholding from us those joys and those divine consolations which once we tasted; yet still strong are our desires after holiness,—great are our obligations to thee; and we are anxious to fulfil them all.

3. But still there are others who say, We would not dare assert that, so far as respects us, we have not given ourselves unto God, and said AMEN to every part of the covenant; but still we fear that the work hath not been done in truth; for God, on his part, has never assured us of it, by giving us *to taste and see that he is good*, as he hath done to others of his redeemed ones. We conceive that, if we had in reality entered into the covenant, Jehovah would, at one time or other, have embraced us in love.

A. That we may be instrumental in affording you

encouragement, we would observe, That you ought not to be alarmed because you have never enjoyed such sensible evidences of a work of grace upon your hearts from God himself: for has not the Lord already bestowed upon you great blessings? can it be called by any other name than that of AMAZING grace, that so much light hath beamed in your souls; that you can discover that you have cordially given yourselves to him.

B. You are too apt to form too great ideas of the MANNER in which Jehovah meets with his people, on the occasion of their covenanting with him. You are frequently led to believe that God, as it were, comes down from heaven, and with a voice loud like thunder, and penetrating as the lightning, addresses you, saying, *Your sins are forgiven you; I am your God.*—It is true, God may have acted on this wise in certain instances; but it is not his ordinary way of dispensing grace. In like manner, you may have *tasted* and *seen* that the Lord is good; but, at the time, may not have viewed this to have been the case. If you consider that grace, in its lowest degree, is true and saving; and that the smallest experience of holy breathings of desire after Christ, are evidential of spiritual life, you may be brought to discover that those degrees of grace, which you may have experienced, ought not to be overlooked, or that you ought not to *despise the day of small things*. For instance:

If you were enabled to lie with humility, as a worm, in the presence of God, wrestling for grace, and melted into tears, on account of a sight of your sins in all their aggravated colours, would not these tears have a taste and relish in them? or were you, on the other hand, to obtain a view of Jesus, in his preciousness, sweetness, all-sufficiency,—so that you

could not refrain from crying, "*Thou art fairer than the sons of men; grace is poured on thy lips;*" or could shed tears of love: have not these *tears* a taste, a sweetness, which you never before experienced; not even when the world smiled upon you, and when you drank deeply of the cup of creaturely comforts.

Yes, were you to be engaged in wrestling with God, and did Jehovah but afford you the smallest drop out of the fountain of divine comforts, which he opens to his people; were he to reach out to you the sceptre of his grace; and though, with a trembling hand, you should touch it, and your souls be strengthened and animated, would you not then also taste, that is, experience a meeting of God with you? and, if you have never tasted more than this, nor ever shall in this life, fear not: your state is good. We are told in the Scriptures, that we are not saved because we are assured of grace, but because we have GRACE wrought in the heart by the Holy Spirit.

Thus we have seen what appertains to the act of covenanting with God, as also the difficulties which arise in the minds of his people, with respect to that solemn work.

On all hands, it must be agreed that, in order to be well PREPARED for the holy sacrament of the Lord's supper, it is of the last importance that we cordially accept of God for our God, by the solemn act of entering into covenant with him; for what can be more suitable to our characters as members of his church, than to approach unto the table, giving our hearts away to him?—and what is better calculated to awaken the souls of his children unto renewed zeal, than to engage in transactions of this serious nature? Besides, the subject of covenanting with God, as a subject of meditation, is useful to natural

men, serving as a mean to convince them that, as long as they have no inclination to devote themselves to the Lord, they cannot acceptably enter within his sanctuary, in order to *eat of his bread, and drink of the wine which he hath mingled*; for that person who is not interested in the covenant itself, may not take its seals in his polluted hands.

But it is time to draw this lecture to a close, by an applicatory address to the different characters which constitute this assembly.

And, with respect to you who are here IGNORANT of the covenant, as to its letter,—and whose lives evidence a total INDIFFERENCE to its interesting contents, shame and confusion ought to cover your faces. The part you are acting is foolish and absurd in the extreme. Would you not consider a poor man chargeable with the highest degree of folly, who, if an estate were left him by will, were to neglect investigating the contents of that testament, or should be unconcerned about obtaining possession of the inheritance? But, sinners, your conduct is infinitely more absurd: the God of heaven has made a glorious testament, and offers to present you with *an inheritance which is incorruptible, undefiled, and which fadeth not away*; but you have never paid the least attention to it; not even so much as to inquire whether your names are mentioned in it; whether its offers of mercy are made to you, or in what manner its invaluable blessings may be obtained. Unhappy besotted men, who, with minds perfectly unconcerned, pass through life without having God for your portion, and destitute of an interest in the covenant! What! is it possible that the repeated invitations of God in his word shall make no impressions upon you, and be nothing more than *seed which falls by the way side*?

But ALL are not chargeable with such gross ignorance: there are some whose knowledge of divine truths is considerably extensive, and who therefore imagine that they have entered within the bonds of the covenant. To convince such that they are perfect strangers to the covenant, is a work truly arduous.—But, sinners, let it be deeply impressed on your minds, that no truths are more clearly recorded in the word, than these; that all, by nature, are far from God, as their covenant God; that all come into the world crimsoned with sin, and blackened with filth; that as such polluted creatures they must be viewed, whilst they are in the world, and that as such too they must die, unless they experience a real change of heart. Without an interest in the covenant, we cannot possibly be saved. O, ye WORLDLING, carnal PROFESSORS, whoever ye be, lay these things seriously to heart! God will not be trifled with: he has promulgated his covenant; he offers it for your acceptance; in terms the most friendly he *invites* you to come within its bonds. Will you dare longer to slight his calls, and refuse to come unto him? Shall the Eternal propose his own Son, in his all-fulness, for your acceptance,—and will you dare to say, *We desire not the knowledge of thy ways?* —Unexampled folly!

But, says the TEMPORARY believer, I do not refuse to attend to the offers of mercy contained within the covenant: all its parts have been the subject of my meditation: I am convinced that it is ALL MY SALVATION, no where else is the way of life pointed out; and therefore I assent to it: for who would act a part so absurd, as not to wish to be saved?—But we entreat you to pause, whilst we ask you a few questions of great moment. You say that you assent to the covenant; but have you ever, in the presence

of God, with a heart approving of his plan of salvation, considered as well the requisitions, as the promises of the covenant? and, when these were made the subject of your meditation, did you fall down before God, and appeal unto him, and to your own conscience,—that you were then determined to enter into covenant with him, and that you made choice of him, and of him only, and altogether as your portion, and were bent on renouncing the service of Satan and the world? or have you been convinced of the propriety of such an unreserved surrender; but still, whilst with one hand you seemed to subscribe the covenant, with the other laid hold of the world and sin? To act thus, indicates that your covenanting with God was not in sincerity and truth; for, besides the one true God, there were other gods to whom you were devoted. As ambassadors of Christ, we pray you, accept, with the whole heart, all that the covenant proposes. God is still inviting you to come and take the Lord for your God; for once more he is about spreading his table in this wilderness. Choose you, this day, whom you will serve: a choice must be made. *If the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him; halt no longer between two opinions.* A man cannot serve two masters. Whoever is not for Christ is against him; and *he that gathereth not with him, scattereth abroad.* An eternal adieu you must bid to the world. But here think not that, when you may thus engage in taking the Lord for your God, that at once the enemies of your salvation will wholly cease exerting their energies, to prevent you from choosing Jehovah for your portion: no; you may expect to find that then he will display all his fury. If you find this to be the case, so far from being deterred from persevering, you ought rather to

take encouragement from this circumstance; for to persevere when the enemy exerts all his malicious rage, will afterwards serve to convince you of the sincerity with which you acted in covenanting with God, and that you view the enemies of Jehovah to be in hostility with yourselves.

SINNERS, if, notwithstanding so many faithful warnings and admonitions as have been given you, you still continue to act a deceitful part with God, such will be the dreadful nature of the ruin that awaits you, such your deplorable condition, when you shall appear at the bar of God, that, were an angel to attempt to delineate it, he would fail in the description. You may be bold now to approach the Lord's table; you may now trifle with God and his word; but then you will discover, when it is too late, that God was serious when he threatened to pour out the vials of his wrath, on the workers of iniquity. O, that you believed this, and were made to lay it to heart in such a manner, that now, whilst the day of grace remains, you would duly consider the *things that belong to your peace.*

But, CHILDREN OF GOD, and especially you whose FAITH IS WEAK, and who have your hearts DISQUIETED within you,—let not the word of terror just uttered in the least alarm YOUR fears. A world lying in sin must have their awful doom made known to them; but the dreadful picture we present to them can in no wise affect YOU. We have endeavoured already to remove many of the difficulties with which your hearts are oppressed, and now again speak peace and comfort to your souls, that you may be animated on the way, and encouraged to *go up through the wilderness, leaning on your redeemer God.* But were we incapable of describing the

deplorable situation of the finally impenitent sinner? did we want words to paint the wrath of God which will soon overtake him? in like manner language fails us when we attempt a description of your happy state, and of Jehovah's divine and ineffable love, grace and mercy towards you. We can only say, that so great is the ardency of his love towards you, that your secret sighs, your tears, your holy desires after him are peculiarly pleasing to him, yea, there is nothing which delights him more. Are you sensible that, by your sins, you have strayed from his fold, and desirous of arising and going to your Father, saying, Father, *we have sinned against heaven and in thy sight*, do you look for mercy at his hands?—such is his compassion that he stands ready to embrace you, with infinitely greater affection than the most tender parent does his rebellious but repenting child. Your sins and backslidings, so far from operating as an obstacle, should serve as a motive exciting you to return unto him. The covenant into the bonds of which you are brought is the covenant of GRACE: it could not be thus denominated, if SINNERS were not admitted within its bonds: besides, Jehovah himself declares in his word, saying, *Come, now let us reason together; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool*, Isai. i. 18. Let nothing then prevent you from renewing your covenant with God. Say not it is an undertaking too GREAT. In one respect it may be thought too great a condescension in him, to deign to look upon such sinful worms of the dust, as we all are by nature. But this difficulty vanishes when we consider that God is himself infinitely great, and that therefore, if the privilege be too great for you to enjoy, it is not

too great for a God to grant: the more unworthy you may be, the greater will be the display of the riches of his grace, and the greater the cause to admire and to adore throughout eternity.

But do you still object and say, True; but we have SUCH SINFUL HEARTS that we fear we shall again prove ourselves unfaithful.—It is a good sign when you are jealous of your hearts, and afraid lest you break the engagements you may have entered into with God: but at the same time remember that God does not require of you to do any thing in your own strength. He well knows that, if left to yourselves, you would be unfaithful in every respect. Consider further that ye are within the bonds of a covenant in which every thing is promised, not only preventing grace, but grace to enable you to persevere to the end, in serving God with faithfulness and zeal. Plead then the promises of God, and say, Lord, on this we wholly depend, *that thy faithfulness faileth not*, and that thou wilt impart unto us as much light, life and strength, *out of the fulness which there is in Jesus*, as we shall need.—

But you who are ASSURED of your salvation, and behold with clearness your interest in the covenant, thank the Lord for having made your hearts willing to embrace such a covenant as this, when naturally they were opposed to all its contents. Though this is free grace, yet you, as his covenant people, ought to make suitable returns to him, and evidence that your hearts overflow with gratitude, by *living righteously, soberly, and godly, in this present evil world*, and by acquiescing in all the dealings of the Lord with you. You promised, when you gave yourselves to him, that you were willing to be saved only in the way which he has devised. Cavil not at the Lord's

dispensation with you, even though he lead you in paths thorny and difficult. Keep near to your God; commune frequently with him as your father and friend, and be true to all the promises which you have made to him. Jehovah, your redeemer and surety, will be faithful to all *the words which have gone out of his mouth*.—He will establish you more and more. The work of grace which he hath begun in you, he will complete, and having *guided you by his counsel* through time, *he will afterwards receive you into glory*.

A M E N.

THE
 PIOUS COMMUNICANT.

Lecture X.

ON THE GREAT MEDIATOR OF THE
 COVENANT.



HAVING, in the two preceding lectures, treated at considerable length, the interesting subject of covenanting with God; we conceived that it would tend to encourage and animate the hearts of the afflicted and dejected children of God, if we attempted a delineation of the character of the great MEDIATOR OF THE COVENANT, who, in Scripture, is emphatically styled the WAY; and whom all his people own to be the ONLY way by which they can be restored to happiness and God.

We shall, therefore, invite your attention,

I. To the FULNESS and ALL-SUFFICIENCY, *which, it hath pleased the Father, should dwell in Christ, the only Mediator for poor and miserable sinners.*

II. To his PERFECT WILLINGNESS to impart life and salvation to the vilest of the vile.

III. To some applicatory OBSERVATIONS, tend-

ing both to convince the impenitent, and to administer encouragement to those whose hearts are dejected and filled with doubts and fears.

What respects the FIRST point of discussion, viz. THAT IN THE GREAT MEDIATOR OF THE COVENANT THERE DWELLS A FULNESS AND ALL-SUFFICIENCY FOR SINNERS: As it is taken for granted, that those truths which are annually taught us in public from the Heidelbergh Catechism, and which respect the necessary QUALIFICATIONS of the Mediator, are well understood, we proceed, without any preliminary observations, to exhibit precious Christ in his all-sufficiency.—There dwelleth in him,

1. A complete fulness as GOD: He is, in all perfections and attributes, the equal of God the Father, and God the Holy Ghost. But especially,

2. He is all-sufficient as the great Mediator of the covenant: for, in consequence of his having, from all eternity, taken upon him to complete the great work of salvation; and because, in time, he hath actually accomplished it by his active and passive obedience; the Father hath invested him with all that fulness which was necessary for the sinner's eternal happiness, to the end that all his elect and redeemed ones might, out of that *fulness, receive grace for grace*, John i. 16. Is it asked, Whence does it appear that the glorious Jesus possesses a fulness for his people? We answer,

A. The NAMES which are given him, set forth in a most perspicuous point of light, the all-sufficiency of the Mediator. Is he called JESUS? What does it import, but that he is the Deliverer and Saviour of his people; who, rescuing them from all evil, puts them in possession of all blessedness, both in the

world that now is, and in that which is to come. Is he denominated CHRIST? It implies that he is the ANOINTED one, who is set apart and qualified for executing the three great offices of PROPHET, PRIEST, and KING:—offices which are necessary for him to hold, if happiness eternal and infinite shall be the portion of his people. Besides these proper names, Jesus, Christ, he is also styled, The LORD *our Righteousness*, Jer. xxiii. 6. *Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace*, Isai. ix. 6.

B. The METAPHORS which Scripture employs to represent him, display his mediatorial fulness. He is not only denominated an ANGEL, as he is the MESSENGER of the Father, but an angel by way of eminence, one infinitely superior to all the angelic host. If he be an angel, the *name of Jehovah is in him*, and he is Jehovah himself, Exod. xxiii. 21;—the *angel of his presence*, Isai. lxiii. 9;—the Head, and Lord of angels, whom they ALL must worship and adore, Heb. i. 6.—He is exhibited in the word under the emblems of *the Sun*, Psalm lxxxiv. 12;—the *Sun of Righteousness*, Mal. iv. 2;—the *Star out of Jacob*, Numb. xxiv. 17;—the *bright and morning Star*, Rev. xxii. 16;—the *day-spring from on high*, Luke i. 78: for, *He shall be as the light of the morning when the sun riseth; even a morning without clouds*, 2 Sam. xxiii. 4. And wherefore is it that such metaphors are employed, but to teach us, that what the natural sun is to the inhabitants of the world, Jesus is to his church? He enlightens, warms, refreshes, and makes it fruitful.

C. To manifest the fulness and all-sufficiency of the Mediator, he is described as a MAN, yes, as *one fairer than the children of men*, into whose lips grace

is poured, Psalm xlv. 2. The spouse in the Canticles, after having given a very particular description of his *head, hair, neck, breast, and feet*, exclaims, *He is the chiefest of ten thousand, and altogether lovely*, Songs v. 16. And Isaiah, with his usual elegance of expression, depicts him to be a man *in whom the Spirit of the Lord is—The spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge, and of the fear of the Lord*, Isai. xi. 2.

D. The Lord Jesus is the great ANTITYPE of all those celebrated worthies, who had flourished in the world previous to his being manifested in the flesh. Is he not stiled the second ADAM, who is the head of the whole family of the elect? Is he not like NOAH, that TRUE COMFORTER, who brings salvation and comforts his people, *with respect to the toil and labour of our hands*, as the name Noah imports, Gen. v. 29. He is the real ISAAC, who is the source from whence holy *laughter* and joy springs to his people. He is another MOSES, yes, a prophet greater than Moses, who hath revealed the whole counsel of God: the real DAVID and SOLOMON, whose *wisdom, fear of God, vast riches, and triumphant victories* over his enemies, are celebrated as unparalleled by any who have preceded or shall succeed him. But why is he represented as the great antitype of all these men, if not to teach us, that he hath done, is doing, and will do more for the advancement of his people's felicity, than any of those have done, who have appeared on the stage of the world before him?

E. He was SHADOWED forth under the Old Testament by many things, all of which combine to teach us, that all fulness dwells in him. The REDEEMERS, or GOELS, who were to exert them-

selves in favour of their destitute kindred, to repurchase the inheritances of those, who by reason of poverty had mortgaged them; and to pay the ransom for them, if sold into slavery;—were striking emblems of that *true Goel*, that great Redeemer Jesus Christ, who was to deliver his people from the *power of Satan*, free them from the dominion of sin, and restore them to the image of God which they had lost. The HIGH-PRIEST, under the Old Testament, arrayed in his magnificent attire, entering into the sacred place, and by offerings making atonement for the sins of the people, was an illustrious type of Jesus, *the High-Priest over the house of God, who by his one offering hath for ever perfected them that are sanctified*, and who, after he was *made perfect* by sufferings, sat down at the right hand of God. Heb. x. 13.

F. The great Mediator of the covenant is exhibited in the word under the emblem of a SHEPHERD, *the great Chief, and only Shepherd, who feeds his flock with knowledge and understanding, carries the lambs in his bosom, and gently leads those that are with young*, Isai. xl. 11,—who, like Jacob, will lead them on *softly, according as they are able to endure*, Gen. xxxiii. 14. He is the true PHYSICIAN who relieves his people from all their spiritual maladies by the application of his precious blood.

G. Christ, as Mediator, is likened to the most GENEROUS and NOBLE amongst birds and animals;—to the generous and towering eagle, who *stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young. spreadeth abroad her wings, and taketh and beareth them on her wings*. For the Redeemer is represented as promising that his people shall *mount up on the wings of an eagle*, to secure them in all dangers, to provide for them in

need, and to keep the eye of his love constantly upon them.—To the LION; for as the *lion of the tribe of Judah*, he hath, by his power, overcome Satan and bruised his head.—To the LAMB; for when *he was led to the slaughter*, like the patient and meek lamb, *he opened not his mouth*.

H. He is frequently also compared to things without life.—To a tree; hence called *The tree of life in the midst of the paradise of God*, Rev. ii. 7.—To the CEDAR of Lebanon—To the APPLE-TREE, Songs ii. 3; *As the apple-tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons: I sat down under his shadow with great delight*.—To the VINE: *I am the vine*, John xv. 1.—To the ROSE and LILY: *I am the rose of Sharon and the lily of the valley*, Songs ii. 1. And why are all these metaphors used, but that they may serve as a ladder, by which we may be elevated to see the worthiness, amiableness, and comeliness, which there is in Jesus.

I. Once more: Christ is compared to WEAPONS of defence.—He is a SHIELD, behind which his people are secure against all the *fiery darts* of Satan, Psalm lxxxiv. 12.—He is a BUCKLER, and the enemies of their salvation fight in vain against them.—An ENSIGN, to which the *Gentiles shall seek*, Isai. xi. 10.—A STRONG TOWER, Prov. xviii. 10; *The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it, and is safe*.—A hiding-place, when the storms of Divine vengeance are ready to fall impetuous on the sinner's guilty head: *A man shall be as an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest*, Isai. xxxii. 2.

K. Again, Christ is likened in the word to every thing in nature which is deemed necessary for our existence,—To WATER, Songs iv. 15.—To FIRE,

Mal. iv. 2.—To BREAD and the MANNA which descended from heaven, John vi. 33.—To RAIN and DEW, Psalm lxxii. 6. And why is he compared to these, but to convince us, that if water be necessary to satisfy our thirst, fire to enlighten and warm us, bread to nourish us, manna to preserve life, rain to make the earth fruitful, and dew to keep alive the herbs and plants, parched by the sultry heat of a summer's sun,—infinitely more necessary is Jesus, in all these respects, to his people.

L. As the all-sufficient Mediator, there are ascribed to him THREE great and glorious OFFICES: for, how would it have been possible for us ever to have formed just and adequate conceptions of the way of salvation and of the covenant of God, unless he, as the great PROPHET and *teacher sent from God*, had taught us the same? We were *blind*, yes, darkness itself: no light shone in the understanding: *the things of the Spirit of God* were esteemed *foolishness*. But Jesus, who hath received the *tongue of the learned*, has clearly unfolded to us the whole counsel of God. He did it previous to his manifestation in the flesh, and he does it still, by his word and spirit. Again, was it possible for us, guilty and polluted creatures, to approach unto God, and enter into covenant with him, if he, as the great HIGH-PRIEST, had not opened the way by his blood, and brought in an everlasting righteousness? Certainly not: for, if he had not entered into the holiest with his blood;—and if he did not still live to intercede, the way of life would be now shut, and we could never go with boldness *to the throne of grace*, Heb. x. 20. In a word, How would it ever have been possible for us to have embraced the covenant, and complied with its terms when revealed, seeing

our inability to help ourselves is so great, and seeing we are so unwilling by nature to be helped, if the Almighty KING, by the sceptre of his strength, had not brought down our towering imaginations, and made our hearts submissive to his grace? Yes, would it have been possible to have continued in a gracious state, unless he still lived as King of Zion, to protect his subjects from the assaults of the enemies of their salvation?

M. Lastly, permit us to remark, that *it pleased the Father* that such a fulness should dwell in the Mediator as is calculated to answer all the wants of his people? For, are they FOOLISH?—in him there is a fulness of WISDOM. Are they GUILTY?—in him there is a fulness of RIGHTEOUSNESS. Are they POLLUTED by their remaining corruptions?—in him there is a fulness for their SANCTIFICATION. Are their ENEMIES numerous, or have they to STRUGGLE with many difficulties?—in him there is PERFECT REDEMPTION, 1 Cor. i. 30. Are they POOR and NEEDY?—in him are hid all the treasures of grace to enrich them. Are they naked?—he clothes and adorns them *with the garments* of salvation, and the robe of his righteousness. So that in Christ there is for his redeemed, all salvation, all grace, all light, all life, and all strength, which is needful for them.

3. But it would not be sufficient that there was such a fulness in Christ as we have delineated above, if his people were not permitted to partake of it. We therefore remark, that the redeemed of the Lord may *receive of his fulness, and grace for grace*. Our Jesus hath the POWER and the right of dispensing grace, in that manner and degree which

best pleases him, and contributes most to their happiness.—

He hath the *power*; for he is God, and as such may dispose of his people, who are his property, without any to controul him. Is he the Mediator of the covenant?—he has a perfect *right* to deal with them as he sees fit; for in the eternal council of peace the Father promised him, that when he shall *have made his soul an offering of sin, he should see his seed*, *Isai. liii. 10.* Now, it being considered, that this would be done, God's faithfulness made it necessary for him to fulfil the promise; and therefore he said, *Ask of me, and I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession*, *Pf. ii. 8.* And is this seed given to him?—it is necessary that he should enrich it by imparting of his fulness, and by bestowing upon it all needful blessings. And for this reason, says Christ, *the Father hath given all things into his hands*, *John iii. 35.* Is he exalted and seated as a king on his throne?—he not only enjoys completely himself all the blessings promised to him; but his people also must necessarily have communications of grace made to them here, and receive too a crown of glory hereafter.

Surely such a view of the all-sufficiency of Christ cannot but be a mean to animate and encourage the fearful children of God to fly unto Jesus with all their wants, burdens, and complaints, to obtain from him a rich supply, support, and relief. Say not, “We have no doubt but the description which has been given of the Saviour's fulness is accurately given: but our distress arises not from a belief that there is a want of ability and fulness in Christ to save, to uphold, and comfort us. It is this that

“ alarms us: Perhaps he is not WILLING to bestow on our souls any measure of grace out of his fulness. On this account we are afraid to come to him.”

But, fearful souls, attend, whilst we attempt to demonstrate, that if the Lord Jesus be mighty to save, and all-sufficient, he is also WILLING to enrich with his grace every sinner that feels his need of it. To do this was the SECOND thing proposed.

That the WILLINGNESS of Jesus to save, and to communicate of his fulness, may be clearly seen, we shall,

1. Shew, from the word, that Christ INVITES in the most affectionate manner the greatest sinners to come to him.

2. Point out that Christ himself has removed all the difficulties which sinners can possibly raise against coming to him.

3. Exhibit in what manner he deputed himself in the days of his flesh, to make his willingness appear.

4. Shew, from the concurrent testimony of Scripture, that the GREATEST of sinners have been saved by him.

A. The Lord Jesus, to evidence his willingness, INVITES the sinner in the most friendly and persuasive manner, to hold fellowship with him. He stands as with arms widely extended, and elevating his voice, says, *Look unto me, and be ye saved*, *Isai. xlv. 22. Let him that is athirst come; and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely*, *Rev. xxii. 17. If thou hadst asked of him, he would have given thee living water*, *John iv. 10. Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it*, *Pf. lxxxix. 10.* Can language better express his compassion for sinners in their deplorable

situation, than he hath done by the mouth of his prophet Hosea? chap. xi. 8, *Mine heart is turned within me, and my repentings are kindled together*; and by Ezekiel, chap. xxxiii. 11, *Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?* The tenderness and concern which Jesus felt for sinners, appears from his weeping over them, and crying, Luke xix. 42, *If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace!* Again, he declares, that he will gather sinners together, as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, Matt. xxiii. 37. And again, Matt. xi. 28, he says, *Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.* O friendly and endearing invitations! Will you not yet believe, that Jesus is willing to save? Yes, methinks we hear you say, we would readily believe it, were it not that some difficulties have arisen, which operate as a bar to the exercise of a confidence in Christ's willingness. But

B. The difficulties which may have presented themselves, Christ himself has removed by this one promise: *All that the Father giveth me shall come unto me, and him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out*, John vi. 39. This promise reaches every case, and makes every obstacle to vanish. If Christ had stated a hundred, a thousand different cases of conscience,—souls in distress might have still made objections that those cases were not exactly in point. But here no objection can be raised. *Him*, says Christ, be he who he may, that cometh to me, I will not cast out. If any should object and say, I am a great sinner, I have too long despised the offers of grace, and strayed from God,—remember, Jesus says, *I am come to seek and to save that which*

is lost. He does not say, let it well be remarked, I am come to save those who are found seeking me; but those who are lost and wandering in the mazes of sinful ignorance; for it is my province to seek, Luke xix. 10. Have you then any sight or sense of the greatness of your misery?—it is evident that Jesus is seeking you: for, to shew the sinner the atrocity of his sin, and his dreadful state, is usually the first step he takes. This, Paul confirms, 1 Tim. i. 15, *This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.* Now, if the words of Christ and his apostle be true, as undoubtedly they are, then you may not hesitate to say, “Christ is willing to save us: for we are sinners, and lost and ruined sinners too.”

C. The Lord Jesus, to display that he is perfectly willing to save, manifested in the days of his flesh, that his compassion was boundless as deity, and that the riches of his love were immense toward the guilty and ruined children of men. Are we not told by an inspired prophet, that he *bore our griefs and carried our sorrows*? Why are we told this, but that it might appear to every attentive enquirer, that if Christ were the great Physician with the diseases of the body, he also healed the maladies of the soul? Did he ever cast any from his presence who came to him for relief, or refuse to help the sons and daughters of affliction and misery, when they humbly sought his face. The Gentiles, in the estimation of the Jews, were considered as *dogs*, men whom the God of Israel must necessarily disregard, because of their ceremonial impurity, yet even these were not only permitted to *eat of the crumbs which fell from his table*; but largely to partake of the blessings of his cove-

nant. It is true that Matthew records, chap. xiii. 58, that Jesus *did not many mighty works in Nazareth*: —But to what was it to be attributed? Certainly not to a want of compassion in Jesus for the inhabitants of his own country; but, as the evangelist expressly mentions, *to their unbelief*: for all who came to him, even there, were helped. Did he not act the part of a tender and faithful physician to the possessed of the devil, to those who were afflicted with the leprosy, to the deaf, and the blind? What better or more conclusive evidence can we have of Christ's willingness to save the chief of sinners, and deliver them from that misery into which sin hath brought them, upon their leaving all, and cleaving to him as the only *hope of Israel*, and Saviour of sinners of the Gentiles?

D. The Lord Jesus, to discover to the guilty sons of men, that he is as WILLING as he is ABLE to save them, hath caused to be recorded in his word a variety of INSTANCES of his actually having rescued from eternal destruction, sinners whose transgressions were of a nature aggravated in the highest degree. Can we form to ourselves any idea of there ever having been a greater sinner than ADAM, the parent of human kind? He not only sinned under circumstances peculiarly calculated to keep him in the way of duty; but he sinned, knowing at the same time, that as the head of his posterity, he would, by his transgression, bring misery and wretchedness on the generations which were to spring from his loins. But were not grace and salvation bestowed upon Adam? He had no sooner *fallen by his iniquity*, than the way of life was revealed to him, and actually promised in these words of the ETERNAL: The seed of the woman *shall bruise the serpent's head*, Gen. iii. 15.

Shall we present you with the character of MANASSEH? Was he not for wickedness unequalled by all the kings of Israel that preceded or succeeded him? He not only sinned himself, but he likewise *made Israel to sin*. His iniquities were of so heinous a nature in the sight of God, that on account of them the Lord would not be prevailed upon to have pity on Jerusalem. Hear how Jehovah expresses himself, Jer. xv. 1, 5, 6: *Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my mind could not be toward this people. Cast them out of my sight, and let them go forth: for who shall have pity on thee, O Jerusalem? or who shall bemoan thee? or who shall go aside to ask how thou doest? Thou hast forsaken me, therefore will I stretch out my hand against thee and destroy thee: I am weary with repenting.* And still, beloved, to this vile Manasseh, God imparted his grace: for it is written, *When he was in affliction he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed to him: and he was entreated of him, and heard his supplication,* 2 Chron. xxxiii. 12, 13. If our attention be turned from the instances which the Old Testament produces, to those which are found in the New, we will be lost in wonder at the contemplation of divine and redeeming love set forth in the conversion of the thief on the cross. He was a thief, perhaps a murderer, and suffered the pains of crucifixion for crimes most atrocious—And yet this miscreant, whom the laws of his country had adjudged unfit to live, found mercy: “Jesus said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, to-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise,” Luke xxiii. 43. But why did Jesus shew him favour? On the one hand, it was, that he might exhibit at this time the efficacy of his blood to save the greatest sinner; and,

on the other, that no person should despair of finding grace, but believe, that whilst the lamp of life continues to burn, the vilest sinner may return—may seek for grace, and look unto him for salvation. Was not Saul of Tarsus, who was afterwards denominated Paul, a sinner above thousands of others? He was a persecutor of the brethren, a blasphemer of Christ, one that consented to the death of Stephen: and yet this wretch obtained mercy. Hear his own words, 1 Tim. i. 12, 13, 14, 15, 16: *I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me; for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious. But I obtained mercy, because I did it in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.* Yes, so free is the grace of Christ, that the very JEWS who had polluted their hands with the shedding of the innocent blood of the Prince of life, and *who had crucified the Lord of glory*, were made the monuments of mercy. For when the apostle Peter, on the day of Pentecost, charged them with these dreadful crimes, many of them *were pricked in their hearts*, and cried, *Men and brethren, what shall we do?* Considerably more instances of this kind might be educed from the Scriptures: but a sufficient number has been mentioned to show that the greatest sinner may hope for grace in Christ.

See thus, beloved,—a Jesus in whom all fulness dwells—a Jesus who is all-sufficient—a Jesus who CAN, and also WILL freely grant salvation to all who come to him, and by him go to the Father.

And now, CONVINCED and ALARMED finners, who by divine grace have your hearts affected with a view of your misery, and who indeed are sweetly inclined to enter into covenant with God, but are afraid to engage in a transaction so solemn, so great,—come, behold this great Mediator of the covenant. Surely nothing can now keep you from approaching unto God, and from enjoying his favour, if it be your earnest and sincere desire to make application to the compassionate Jesus. Therefore,

1. Be not too much alarmed, nor despond, by reason of a view of the number, the aggravated nature of your sins, or your long continuance in them, neither let the JUSTICE and holiness of God, nor your having BROKEN that law, under the curse of which by nature you are lying, terrify your souls.

A. I say, *Be not too excessively cast down* at the view of the NUMBER, the AGGRAVATED nature of your sins, or your having so long CONTINUED in them. Let us not be understood to intimate, that you have no reason both for sorrow and distress: we declare the contrary; for when sin is discovered in its awful nature, and its dreadful effects are seen and felt in any degree, you will think you cannot be sufficiently humbled on account of it; and if God did not sometimes moderate the impressions which a view of having sinned against his divine majesty produces; and were he not, at those times, to dart a ray of grace divine into your souls;—we can readily conceive, that you must sink beneath your accumulated load of guilt. But, though this be really so, still you ought not to entertain the sentiment, that they are unpardonable, or that you cannot be made the subjects of salvation; for such sentiments have their origin in hell, where terror and

despair always reign—They are suggestions of the adversary of your souls, who, when any are led over to Christ, in an EVANGELICAL, calm, and gentle way, seldom fails to suggest to such, “that they have not had as great views of sin as were necessary, nor have been enough distressed, broken and contrite in heart, on account of their having departed from the living God, and violated his holy law.” This same adversary appears in quite a different form, when God, in order to alarm the sinner’s conscience, exhibits himself in all the terrors of his majesty, and presents to view the holiness of his nature, and makes himself known to be a consuming fire to the workers of iniquity. Then he is busy to excite alarm; then, in order to keep Jesus out of sight as long as he possibly can, he is bold, contrary to the plainest declarations of the word, to discourage, and to induce a belief, that the sins of such persons are too great to be forgiven, and that it is the extreme of presumption even to think of approaching unto God, of soliciting pardon at his hands, or of fondly cherishing the hope that he will remove out of his sight transgressions which are of such a scarlet colour, and of such a crimson dye. O sinners, whose souls are disquieted within you, who are terrified at the sight of the malignity and magnitude of your guilt,—cease to fear: behold, there is a great Mediator—He hath made atonement for all sins; the efficacy of his blood is infinite. Let your souls, then, take refuge beneath the shadow of his wings. He will not reject you because you come with hearts oppressed by fears, and with eyes melted into tears, or because you approach him with a trembling hand. His sceptre of mercy is extended to you:—touch it;—and let sentiments like these obtain: “We will not any longer reflect dishonour

“ upon Jesus by keeping at a distance from him;
 “ but will place the crown upon his head, and sub-
 “ mit to him as one who is mighty to redeem the
 “ chief of sinners.”

B. Let not the HOLINESS and JUSTICE of God fill your souls with terror and dismay in too high a degree: for now it must be evident to you, from what has been said, that the flames of divine wrath can be extinguished by Jesus, the glorious Mediator of the new covenant, and in virtue of his active and passive obedience. Justice having sheathed its avenging sword, God can address you, saying, *Wrath is not in me: lay hold of my strength: I will make peace with you.* And you, in the delightful strains of the poet, may reciprocate,

Should sevenfold forms of vengeance roll,
 And shake this globe from pole to pole,
 No thunder-bolt shall daunt my face,
 While Jesus is my hiding-place.

C. Suffer yourselves not to be the subject of despair at the view of the CURSE of that law which you are sensible you have broken, and with the requisitions of which you acknowledge you have not complied; for, behold the Mediator has brought in a complete righteousness, and hath removed the curse when he was made a curse for us.

2. Distressed souls, let this also administer comfort to you, that it is that God whom the Scriptures declare to be a righteous and a holy God, and an angry Judge, who hath himself constituted this Mediator to be the only way to life and salvation. In the counsels of Eternity, Jehovah set apart for this work his glorious, only, and beloved Son. In time he revealed him to

his church by promises, shadows and types; and, *in the fulness of time*, he sent him *into the world made of a woman, in all things like unto his brethren, sin only excepted*. He being in the world, the Father, that divine justice might be satisfied, *laid upon him the iniquity of us all*; and demanded that Jesus, as the surety of the guilty, should suffer, bleed, die: but at the same time made it evident to all, that he was well pleased in him:—for, by a voice from heaven, he declared, “*This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased,*” Matt 3. 17. i. e. his person is the object of my delight, and his righteousness is, in every respect, satisfactory to my righteousness.—Of this we cannot but be convinced, when we consider that God raised him, and exalted him to a seat at his right hand. Now, afflicted and fearful souls, are you sensible of your being sinners? Is it revealed to you in the gospel, that that God whom you have offended by your sins, hath, from a principle of free and sovereign love, grace and compassion, appointed a Mediator to reconcile sinners to himself; offers this perfect Saviour to all who feel compunction and anguish on account of sin; and calls from heaven, saying, Behold my son, the mighty Redeemer; I have found a ransom; with his obedience I am fully satisfied. O, do you approve of him too; take hold of him; embrace him by faith, and you shall be reconciled to me.

Surely, if distressed souls were duly to contemplate these things, nothing could keep them from God; every obstacle would be removed out of the way, which at present deters them from going to him with boldness to seek for grace.

But it is time to apply the subject more particularly to those composing this auditory, who have convened to-day in this sacred temple, professedly

with the object of preparing to meet the Lord at the table which again is soon to be spread in our presence.

No truths can be more USEFUL, none more APPLICABLE to such an occasion, than those which have been discussed in this lecture: for, this sacrament is the sacrament which the Lord Jesus hath instituted to keep alive in the minds of his people the memory of his love, displayed in his agonizing sufferings and ignominious and accursed death on the cross.—The bread and wine are designed to be striking emblems of his body which was broken, and of his blood which was shed for the remission of sins, and for the sealing of the everlasting covenant of grace.—In the Lord's supper, the eye of faith beholds the great Mediator as that one stone *upon which there shall be seven eyes*, as that chief corner-stone on which the whole foundation of our salvation rests. At the table, precious Christ presents himself to his people in all his mediatorial fulness, as one whose *body is meat indeed, and whose blood is drink indeed*. In a word, at that sacred board, he makes an offer of all he has, to the children of his love, and declares that he is willing to enrich with his grace, and glory too, ALL who come unto him: for, his language to the guests is, *Come eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled*, Prov. ix. 5.

But here a question of the greatest magnitude may be asked, Have we a right to approach to that ordinance?—We answer,

That sinners who have never been CONVERTED to God, find but little difficulty on their minds, with respect to drawing nigh to the table: senseless of shame and presumptuous to an extreme, they will not be deterred by any thing we can address to them: they

will not be deterred by any thing we can address to them ; they say, God is merciful and gracious ; and contemplate those perfections of God not as illustrated in Christ. But, UNCONVERTED sinners, know that it is an eternal truth, that, if God were to display his grace in any other way but through the Saviour, both his holiness and justice would be sullied. You say, God is gracious ;—but you have never as yet taken refuge beneath the shadow of Jesus' wings, in and through whom alone he bestows his grace. You are bold to come to his holy table ; but you have never experienced any sincere desires after the Lord Jesus, nor have your hearts been exercised by faith and love. O that you did but see how guilty you are before God ; that you have violated his holy law, which is thundering its dreadful curses against you. The guilt which you have contracted you cannot remove, even though it were in your power to be attempting it through the endless ages of eternity. For, consider what it cost the Son of God himself to effect it as the surety of sinners. He must leave the throne of his glory ; he must become man ; die the accursed death of the cross, before one sinner could be admitted within the bonds of the covenant of grace. How then can you conceive it possible that you can be admitted into the presence of God, and enjoy the light of his countenance without an interest in the divine Redeemer ?

I am aware that there are MANY of you who, having received a religious education, are convinced that, OUT OF CHRIST THERE IS NO SALVATION. Such are apt to imagine and flatter themselves that they have a saving interest in him ; but I pray you, tell me on what principle you imagine that this is the case ? Jesus is indeed a Saviour ; but he saves not

ALL men: it is to be feared that the least, by far the least part of Adam's sinful race look to him as their Saviour. If you be interested in Christ, you must be changed in the temper and disposition of your minds, and sin must no longer be the object of your love. To live careless and to pursue sinful courses, are incompatible with the religion of Christ; and to live thus is dangerous: for, sooner or later, you will find that you have grossly mistaken the road which leads directly to happiness and God.—If you have never been experimentally taught your misery, and felt your need of the Mediator; if you have never seen that he is *the chief of ten thousands, and altogether lovely*; if you have never fled to him with ardent desires of being found in him,—of this ONE thing you may be certain, that you are without Christ in the world, and are lying under the wrath of God!

Others again approach the table because they have been admitted members in full communion with the church, merely out of custom, or because religion is in fashion. Such have no other reason for eating of the bread and drinking of the wine in the sacrament, but because others do the same. They perhaps do not once think of Christ, much less fly to him as their refuge. O how deplorable and wretched is your situation, CHRISTLESS PROFESSORS. Is it true that those were not real Jews, who were such only in externals, and rested satisfied with having received the sign of circumcision, being strangers to the inward circumcision of the heart? in like manner, it is true that they are not real Christians, who, having done no more than make a profession of their faith before the church, venture to go to the table of the Lord. Such only are considered by God to be true believers, who, being united to Christ, are made partakers

of his anointing, and are acquainted with the religion of the heart.—You may presume, as you have done often before now, to sit as the people of God sit, and eat of the bread, and drink of the wine; but have you not reason to fear that, when Christ, the Master of the feast, shall come to survey the guests who are seated around his sacred board, that he will address you, saying, *Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having on the wedding garment?* An awful, a dreadful silence, expressive of your dismay, will then be observed.—Sinners, take heed to yourselves; presume no more to rush into the presence of God with your unhallowed heart. God will not be mocked.

There are others again whose INSENSIBILITY is not so great; who have indeed been affected under the means of grace, and have felt some desires in their hearts after Christ, when he has been described in the character of a Saviour, as one absolutely necessary, most precious, and altogether lovely; but who at the same time view those desires which have been thus raised, and those religious impressions which have been sometimes made upon their minds, as the foundation of their hope; that they are actually interested in Christ, and thus awfully deceive themselves: for,

1. Their convictions have not been with respect to ALL, but only to SOME particular sins. They do not believe that, *from the crown of their heads to the sole of the foot*, they are *nothing but wounds and putrifying sores*; that every faculty of the soul is depraved, and that they are in the sight of a holy God, both unholy and unclean.—And remember, sinners, that until your convictions lead you both to see, to feel, and to confess that you are *poor, and miserable, and blind, and naked*, they cannot be esteemed to be any thing more than the convictions of natural conscience.

2. When convictions are genuine and saving, they bring us to Christ: for, mere natural convictions, as such, have never procured salvation for ANY, but on the contrary have driven MANY to despair. But those who enjoy those convictions which are gracious and saving, have large discoveries made to them of Jesus Christ, and they are made sensible of their need of him. Beholding his loveliness and preciousness, then ardent desires are created in their hearts after him, and they exclaim, O that Jesus were ours!—Now, until you have experienced such holy breathings of soul after glorious Christ: in vain do you flatter yourselves with having an interest in Christ; in vain do you presume to hope that all is well because you have simply been convinced that you are conceived and born in sin, and have violated in some respects the law of God.—Many foolishly think that, because they SOMETIMES wish that Christ were to them the hope of glory; that this is faith, which purifies the heart, works by love, and savingly unites to Christ. What madness! what infatuation! for, if they examine themselves with that care which the case demands, will they not find that they can often satisfy themselves without a vital union to him? What would you think of a person who came to your door, to ask for meat and drink, to satisfy his hunger, and quench his thirst? Could you entertain a belief that he was in earnest, if he were to be satisfied with any gift made to him, which did not tend to appease hunger and remove thirst? Certainly not; for if his appetite were keen, his hunger and thirst great, he would refuse the offer of the world, for a morsel of bread and a cup of cold water.—Thus it is with many: they say that they DESIRE Christ, but they still can be contented without Christ, and prefer

sin, the world, and its pleasures, before him.—If sin be cherished, Christ hath never been embraced. If sin and the world rule in the heart, genuine desires after Christ have never been experienced.—O, deceive not yourselves. You cannot *serve two masters*—CHRIST and BELIAL.

Is it your wish to ascertain whether you have a RIGHT before God to sit down at his table, and to eat of the bread, and drink of the wine which the great Mediator of the covenant provides for his guests? we hasten to give you every requisite information on this subject.

1. You neither have a right before God, nor can you expect to receive the sacrament in a manner acceptably to him, or profitably to yourselves, provided you have never been seriously ALARMED with respect to your awful condition by nature, and continue at ease in your sinful state, without manifesting any concern as to your eternal interests, or ever making such enquiries as these,—Lord, what will be the end of our course, which is so opposite to that which thou hast prescribed in thy word? Do we not evidence, by the general tenor of our conversation, that we are still unconverted, dead in trespasses and sins, and wholly under the influence of principles which actuate the men of the world; but which the real children of God never follow? and if left to ourselves, and suffered to pursue the same line of conduct, must we not for ever perish? must we not expect that our punishment will be beyond description, since we have so long lived under the means of grace, and so uniformly slighted the offers of salvation?—If your minds have never been in any wise exercised on these subjects, and if they have never made any abiding impression on your minds, there

is reason to suspect all is not right; yes, that your approach to the table will neither illustrate the glory of the Master of the feast, nor prove beneficial to your own souls.

2. Has Jesus, who is the great Mediator of the covenant, and the only way by which we can obtain reconciliation with God, never yet appeared amiable in your view? Have you never seen him to be the only one all-sufficient to redeem, willing to save, and mighty to restore the sinner to the favour and friendship of God?

3. Have these views of sin and misery, and of Jesus and his fulness, excited cordial desires in your hearts after him, and habitually disposed you to run, to fly to Jesus, to *be found in him*, to hunger and thirst after him, and to look unto him as the true *balm* of gilead, and the only physician who can heal the innumerable diseases which sin hath brought in its train?

4. Have you ever experienced, in virtue of the Spirit's divine influences on your hearts, a CHANGE in principle and in practice, which your acquaintance cannot but notice, and which you yourselves must acknowledge, saying,—Once we were disposed to pursue the follies and sinful pleasures of this world, and engage in its service; but now the world fades upon our sight; its riches, its honours, its enjoyments, are as nothing, “the veriest atoms of an atom world.”

Now examine yourselves as to each of these points, as in the presence of God, and with the greatest degree of faithfulness; and, if you find that you are strangers to these exercises and experiences, can you with any propriety approach the table of the covenant? Hath Christ spread it for such as you? Do you not conceive that there is danger of eating and drinking

judgment to yourselves? O! that your eyes were opened! that you beheld the deplorable condition into which sin has placed you!—Are you insensible of your misery? the greater is your danger: it is with you as with one who has a member of his body mortified: as long as he has no feeling of pain, especially when the knife is applied to the afflicted parts, the surgeon adjudges the wound to be dangerous. Do not think that these things are spoken and so often repeated by the ministers of Christ, only with a view of creating terror in your minds: they declare nothing but solemn realities. Say not, that you are not so abandoned and wicked as many of your acquaintance are. Say not, that your hearts are not so bad as is represented, and that therefore you have no reason to fear the wrath divine.—My friends, believe us, when we declare that it is impossible to express by words the greatness of your misery. If you remain unconcerned, and continue to despise the offers of salvation, do you not act a part more base, more ungrateful, and more offensive to God, than the devils did? They sinned ONCE, and grace has NEVER been offered to them; consequently they cannot sin against it: but you have sinned times and ways without number against the God and Mediator of the covenant.—O dreadful thought! another mediator will never be sent to you. Refusing to accept of Christ, you reject him who alone can save. Hear what the apostle Paul addresses to persons in your situation, Heb. xii. 25, *If they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven.* Chap. x. 29, *Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son*

*of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the spirit of grace?—And therefore be awakened to a holy concern about your everlasting peace. No longer despise that grace which is so freely offered to you. Cleave no more to the chains with which Satan has been holding you captive at his will. Suffer yourselves not to be seduced or deceived any longer by his artful suggestions. He is a liar from the beginning. Does he intimate to you that God is MERCIFUL; that it would be inconsistent with the goodness of his nature to leave you to perish eternally; or would he induce a belief that you have time sufficient yet left, in which you may repent and return to God? Does he tell you that youth still blooms on your countenance; that the world has innumerable charms; or would he prompt you to consider the path which leads to heaven, not to be so narrow nor so difficult as you have been made to believe it to be; or in other words, that you may be savingly interested in Christ, and yet pursue the things of time with equal avidity as before you came to him?—My friends, listen not to the tempter: he designs to charm you into the gloomy mansions of devils damned. The word of God directs to no other way of salvation, but that which we have exhibited at this time. We address you in the language of the apostle of the Gentiles, *Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.* There is a wo denounced against those that are at ease in Zion, and that trust in the mountains of Samaria.*

The period is fast hastening when the vials of wrath will be poured out on your devoted heads, unless now you hasten and fly to lay hold of the only

hope set before you. Would to God that these things deeply affected your hearts, and made that impression which their vast importance merits.

But, CHILDREN OF GOD, we have also a word to address to you; especially to such among you whom doubts oppress, and fears alarm and distress. What we have just been saying, with a view to the conviction of sinners, perhaps may have been the cause of some degree of terror to you. It is one of the most difficult parts of the ministerial office, on the one hand, to bring hypocrites and the careless from the false foundations on which they have raised their hopes, and to lead them to a discovery of themselves; and, on the other, not to alarm and overwhelm with greater fear the dear children of God. By experience it is found, that they frequently apply to themselves, what is spoken to awaken the careless and unconcerned. And again, what ministers, who are faithful, introduce into their discourses with a view to animate and to comfort the people of God, sinners are frequently disposed to apply to themselves. Hence men are rendered careless, or they fall into a fatal despondency.

Come hither, then, distressed and fearful children of God.

1. Is there any thing of which you are more sensible, than that you are sinners—great sinners, yes, the greatest of sinners, and that you merit at the hand of God to be cast into hell, and experience everlasting destruction from the presence of God? Do you not often even reason thus with yourselves? Can there be found any where, any so vile as we are?—any who have such sinful hearts as we have? And here we see the mark which distinguishes the true Christian from the hypocrite: the latter con-

ceives himself to be better than others, and believes that he is not so bad as conscience, the faithful monitor of man, would sometimes intimate. The former is ready to confess, that he is the vilest of the vile—He is certain that none is so polluted and defiled with sin as he is—He hesitates not to exclaim, *I am the chief of sinners*. It is from a view of this awful truth, that whilst the hypocrite can go on his way apparently rejoicing, the real follower of Christ experiences distress and fear.

2. And what are the exercises of your souls in consequence of having discovered your misery? Do you not, with a sincere sorrow of heart for sin, also feel ardent desires after his grace, and pardon through the perfect atonement of Jesus Christ? Are you not willing to renounce all your righteousnesses—to run to Jesus, to cast yourselves at his feet? Is not Jesus precious to your souls? Do you not entertain a higher esteem for Christ than for any thing which this world affords? Is not Jesus preferred before honour and wealth? Could you be satisfied with any thing short of Christ? Now what does all this evidence, but that *Christ is yours*? One who is unconverted cannot be thus exercised.

3. Is not Jesus, in whom all fulness dwells, your *all and in all*? Whence have you derived that LIGHT of conviction which has irradiated your minds, but from Christ, that great Prophet who opens the eyes of blind sinners? Whence is it that you have gotten such a sight of his preciousness? Who but himself has made the discovery to you, that he is *the chief of ten thousand, and altogether lovely*? Is not Jesus also all and in all to you in SANCTIFICATION? Whence is it that you so

anxiously desire greater conformity to his image, but because he *liveth in you*?

4. You perhaps object and say, "If Christ dwelt in us, would so many evidences of sinful corruptions remain? We cannot conceive how it possibly can be." But know it, afflicted and fearful saints, grace does not instantaneously and entirely root out the corruptions of the heart. Whilst life remains, two different principles are found in all Christians; a sinful principle and a gracious one; and if this were duly considered, you could not but readily conclude, that you are in a gracious state: for, must you not confess before God and the world, that to sin, is productive of grief to your souls? and can you not appeal to the Eternal himself, and declare, that nothing would afford you more joy, satisfaction, and delight, than to have sin mortified, and grace more lively, and exercised in a higher degree?

But do you still say, "Notwithstanding all this, we dare not presume to indulge a hope that we have grace: for if we were interested in Christ, and might call him ours, would not our doubts vanish, and our fears subside? Would not the Lord Jesus embrace us in the arms of his love, and permit us at least to taste some drops of living water out of himself, that *fountain which is opened for sin and uncleanness*?"

But, O ye children of Zion, who go on your way oppressed by such fears, and agitated by such various doubts,—be not discouraged, but continue waiting upon the Lord. He is a sovereign in all his gracious dispensations. You are called to live by faith, and not by sight. If darkness obtain, may not the cause of it often be found in yourselves? For,

1. Do you not rest too much upon your frames?

When your hearts are lively, animated, and in the experience of much joy and consolation, because you have once cordially surrendered yourselves to Christ, then you conceive all to be well; and your language is, *Our mountain stands strong, we shall never be moved.* But if, on the other hand, corruptions arise;—if the heart be dull and heavy;—then you are inclined to believe, that, because it is thus with you, it is impossible that you should be in a state of grace. To judge of our state merely by the frames of our minds, is most absurd: for it is an eternal truth, that Jesus alone is the *foundation* and *rock* of salvation. Besides, to determine your state by the peculiar feelings you may have with respect to things heavenly and divine, the result will be TO-DAY, that your faith is strong; to-morrow, that your case will seem desperate.

2. May not another cause of your entertaining such fears be this; that you have improper views of the TERMS on which you are to come to the Lord Jesus. You falsely imagine, that you must bring something with you to Christ. You would wish to have such exercises as, if put in the balance, would be an equivalent to the grace of God and the love of Christ. Your language is, “It cannot be, that by
“ a mere willingness to accept of Christ, by a desire,
“ a hungering and thirsting after him, we can have
“ God triune for our God and portion. There
“ must be a strong, ardent love to Christ, or the
“ Eternal cannot so delight in us, as to accept of
“ us.” In this also you are mistaken; for we nowhere read in Scripture, that our frames must equal the love of Jehovah; but we are told almost in every part of the sacred volume, that to obtain the confi-

dence of children, God demands nothing more than the BELIEVING, the WILLING heart.

What! is nothing more than a willing heart required? Where is the person who would not be willing, who would not be glad to be saved? But suffer us to ask you,

A. Do you not remember the time when you were unwilling; when you were opposed to God and his service; when your hearts rose up against the grace offered in the gospel, and that *narrow way* which our Lord represents as leading unto life; when, if not in so many words, yet, by your actions, you said to God, *Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways.*

B. Yes, even after God had given you a view of the nature of his service, had you not many difficulties to surmount before you would declare for God, and Christ, and depart from your former sinful pursuits? Did you not meet with much opposition from Satan, and the world? Did you not often resolve, saying, Now we will lead different lives from what we have formerly done; henceforward we will live above the world, and serve Christ.—But have you not been repeatedly diverted from your purpose? Did it not cost you many a sigh, many a tear, and much poignant distress, before God, which proved to be too powerful for you; and you were made to exclaim, “Lord, thou hast turned us, and we were “turned: thou hast been too strong for us, and to “thee the palm of victory must be yielded.” Have you indeed experienced these things? Is it not both most unreasonable, yes, most sinful too, to *despise the day of small things*?

C. Was not Jesus, and his plan of grace, not only in your first exercises, so precious to your souls,

that you immediately bade an eternal adieu to the service of sin, but we ask you whether Christ and his service do not now wholly delight you? Must you not honestly confess, that still you see that your hearts are *deceitful and desperately wicked*; and that you daily need Jesus more and more? that he becomes constantly more precious and amiable in your eyes,—yes, altogether lovely; in a word, that it is the life of your souls to be continually desiring and loving him? Are these your exercises? What does it prove, but that you have the same exercises as are found in those concerning whom the smallest doubts cannot be entertained, but that they are the chosen and redeemed of the Lord; for, hear what the apostle Peter writes to the churches, “*Unto you which believe he is precious* ;” and he that believeth in him shall not be ashamed. 1 Pet. ii. 7.

D. Is it not your fixed determination and desire, through grace, to live for that Jesus under whose banners you have enlisted? Undoubtedly you must answer in the affirmative, saying, This is indeed our ardent wish, and nothing can be more reasonable than to follow where he leads; but to execute what we thus desire, and to engage in this reasonable service, to our shame it must be spoken, is but little regarded. To us Jesus is indeed precious: he has possession of our hearts; but we are wanting in zeal; weak and feeble are our endeavours to advance the honour of his name: too easily are we seduced by sin, Satan, or the world: hence our confidence is shaken, and doubts succeed.—We believe your complaints are founded in fact; but we do not ask you what your actual attainments and performances have been, but what your desires and purposes are. Would it not afford you the highest possible

satisfaction if you were more holy; and to become so, do you not often go to the Lord Jesus, to receive grace and strength? Does it not create real sorrow of heart, if, at any time, you have, by an untender walk, reflected dishonour on his name? What think you? Are not these so many evidences that Jesus is the supreme object of your love, and that God, in mercy, has visited you with his salvation?

No longer then doubt of your interest in Christ, and of your having received, out of his fulness, his saving grace. Come, meditate frequently on his all-sufficiency. All that is in Christ is yours, and purposely designed for your everlasting benefit. Are you IGNORANT? with him is WISDOM, to teach you the way in which you should go. Is the load of your DEBT daily increasing, and does your GUILT accumulate by every repeated transgression? with this High Priest there is a fulness of righteousness. Do you feel your hearts to be polluted and defiled by sin, and your walk and conversation deficient in tenderness and humility? with him is sanctification for his chosen. Are you surrounded by innumerable enemies? he is made of God unto you, complete REDEMPTION. Are you full of wounds and putrifying sores? Jesus sustains the name and character of JEHOVAH ROPHE, the Lord that healeth you. Are you dejected and broken in heart? behold in Jesus that merciful, compassionate, and faithful High Priest, who is the *consolation of Israel*, the light, life, strength, and power of his people.

Of this fulness which Christ has for his people, he is always WILLING to impart as they need it. Yes, he always feels for your woes, and is afflicted in all your afflictions. O then, let these considerations persuade you to look continually upon him. When

you elevate the eye of faith to this glorious Mediator, be assured he will cast upon you a look of complacency and love, and say, *Thou hast RAVISHED my heart with one of thine eyes.*—If you throw yourselves into his arms, he will receive you in mercy, and speak comfortably to your souls. If you fly to him, he will reach out to you the sceptre of his grace; for, his prevenient love is divine, eternal, most affectionate, and *passeth knowledge.*

Behold, once more he gives you an evidence of it by giving you another pressing INVITATION to approach unto him in the holy ordinance of the Supper. At the head of that table, which is soon to be spread, he will appear, and, addressing you, and all his afflicted sons and daughters, he will say, Behold here the emblem of that blood which streamed from my pierced side: by this blood, I will cleanse you from all iniquity. For you it was shed. I, even I, am he that *blotteth out all your transgressions, for my name's sake; I will not remember your sins:* though they be like scarlet, yet, by that blood, I will make them white as snow.—And further, to give the fullest evidence of his love, as that which *passeth knowledge*, when he sees you standing at a distance, and afraid to draw near, he will even *wait* to be gracious, and, like the father of the prodigal, run to meet and embrace you.—O communicants! all things then are ready: the Master calleth for you. Be encouraged to arise: be no longer *faithless, but believing*, and, with the confidence of children, occupy your seats around the table which your Jesus spreads; both to demonstrate that no love is like redeeming *love*, and that none provides so liberally as he for the wants of his people.

But we cannot close this lecture without addressing a few words to you, *children* of God, who have received brighter evidences of your being interested in this Mediator.

1. Let not your hearts only be exercised with respect to God the FATHER, as the God of the covenant, and with respect to the covenant and its several parts; but especially let the eye of faith be constantly fixed on 'Christ, and his all-sufficiency, as the Mediator of God's appointment. We are fearful that you are not sufficiently exercised with respect to these; and hence, perhaps, it is, that you have so little confidence and Christian boldness, when you approach the Lord's table. You are apt to dwell too much upon your sins, and your indwelling corruptions, which unavoidably must produce fear and painful anxiety. It is good, it is reasonable, to keep our sins constantly in view: there is abundant cause of being ashamed and humbled, on account of your depravity; but your meditations on these should not, as is too often the case, keep you from God. When you reflect upon the aggravated nature of your transgressions, the eye of faith must be fixed on the great Mediator of the covenant, as one upon whom was laid all the iniquities of the whole elect world. Then a retrospective view of sin, whilst it humbles your souls, and makes you appear little in your own eyes, will contribute to your real advantage. By it you will discover your need of Christ, and consequently he will become far more precious to you.

2. Let your souls make a constant use of Christ for SANCTIFICATION; and to this end repeatedly contemplate, and apply to him as one who is all-sufficient, in every respect, to supply your wants, and

willing to afford you that relief which you need. Have you a deep sense, at times, of your misery and wretchedness? make use of him as your physician, who heals the diseases of those whom sin has deeply wounded, and rendered truly wretched. Are you tempted to depart from the ways of righteousness? apply to him as the great shepherd of the flock, who seeks with care the sheep of his pasture, brings them to his fold, and, with peculiar care, guards and defends them in all the assaults of hell and sin. Are you walking in darkness? apply to him as your *sun*, your teacher, your counsellor, to give you every needful instruction; for he has promised to counsel his people, and keep his eye upon them for good. Do you need preservation from the power of your enemies, when they combine for your destruction? use Jesus as your SHIELD, to secure you from their fiery darts. Are you pursued and hunted by Satan? *flee as a bird to your mountain*, to Jesus *that strong tower*, to whom *the righteous run, and are safe*. Thus to act, will tend to advance you in holiness, and make you to experience comfort unspeakable and divine, whatever your situations in life may be.

In a more especial manner, we exhort you, make Jesus the object of your meditation, now that you are again about to approach the sacred table, where he unfolds to the view of his people, *that in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily*. Let your fellowship be with him; open your hearts to him: he will enrich you with the treasures of his grace. Approach with the confidence of children, and with joy. He will not *leave you without a witness*. Do your sins stare you in the face? let this be your comfort, that you *have an advocate and high priest with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous*.

May the Lord, who is able to do for us more abundantly than we can ask or think, bestow upon us every needful blessing, out of that fulness which there is in Jesus, to the praise of the glory of his grace, and to our joy and eternal salvation !

AMEN AND AMEN.



THE

PIOUS COMMUNICANT.

Lecture XI.

FAITH'S APPLICATION OF CHRIST, OR THE
USE WHICH THE TRUE BELIEVER MAKES
OF THE GREAT MEDIATOR OF THE COVE-
NANT, IN ORDER TO PROMOTE HOLINESS
 IN HEART AND LIFE, AND TO INCREASE
 HIS JOYS AND CONSOLATIONS.



THE all-sufficiency and willingness of the Lord Jesus to *save to the uttermost all who come to God by him*, were the delightful themes on which the children of God, who are just commencing the divine life, and who, though oppressed with doubts and fears, are anxious to enter into covenant with God, were invited to meditate upon in the preceding discourse.—The design of the present lecture is, to unfold to the view of those who have solemnly covenanted with God, in what manner to make use of the Lord Christ, so that they may increase in spiritual strength, advance in grace, and have their consolations to abound.—To accomplish this object, we propose,

I. To caution the children of God against some things which prevent their advancement in holiness,

and are obstacles in the way of their attaining to true comfort.

II. To inquire in what a believing use of Christ consists, with respect to its several parts.

III. To attempt the removal of some of the difficulties which not unfrequently arise in the minds of the people of God, with regard to this subject.

IV. To conclude the lecture with an application drawn from the subject, and adapted to the various situations of those who compose this audience.

The FIRST thing proposed was, to offer some cautionary remarks to the consideration of the children of God, with regard to some points which always impede a growth in grace, and an advancement in holiness, and in the consolations of the divine life. And agreeably to this,

1. We recommend it to them that they be on their guard not to contemplate Deity barely in a general point of view; but rather as he has been pleased to reveal himself in his word as TRIUNE, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and that too with respect to the particular part which each of those divine persons sustains in the work of salvation.—We are too apt to make the Father the object of our meditations, independent of the Son; hence he exhibits himself to us in all the terrific forms of a holy and righteous judge, and the soul must lose its confidence in him, and fear and dread dismay be the natural result, when it attempts to approach into his presence.—As it is the peculiar work of the Spirit to bring the elect, who by nature are in a state of absolute impotency, to embrace the Lord Jesus, it is, therefore, necessary for them to consider God as he has made himself known in the scriptures of truth, and by the Son, through

the divine influences of the holy spirit, to approach unto the Father.

2. There is danger arising to the people of God from another source: they are liable, at times, to be unmindful of their covenant relation to Jehovah, and in their dealings with him too often consider themselves not as being his covenant people, and they conduct accordingly; or if when they go to God they view themselves as standing in covenant with him, it is a circumstance which frequently occurs, that they conceive that covenant to be in many respects, as that which the Eternal made with Adam, and which required much to be done and performed in his own strength.—In a word, they sometimes contemplate the covenant, but consider not that Jesus is the foundation and prop on which the building rests; although they obligate themselves to discharge all those duties which God demands of them, yet they must not think that by their exertions they can fulfil those divine requisitions; their reliance, not only in part, but altogether, must be upon that grace which is promised in the covenant which is derived from the fullness of Christ, and communicated by the Holy Ghost.

3. Many of God's children, in dealing with the Mediator, consider him too much,

A. In a general point of view. They do not apply to him sufficiently, with respect to their particular necessities and circumstances of soul and body into which they have been brought, as if the glorious Redeemer, because he is now exalted to his throne, felt no more concern for his church at large, and no longer was engaged to preserve and strengthen the individual members who constitute his mystical body. To form such views of Christ, reflects on his mediato-

rial character; the Lord Jesus has still the same affection for his people in his state of glory, as ever he possessed in the days of his humiliation, and he permits them still to come and lay before him their particular wants and necessities.

B. Too many of God's children are impeded in their progress by contemplating the Mediator too abstractedly, both as GOD, as MAN, or as a JUDGE who is transcendent in majesty and glory.

a. They too frequently consider his GODHEAD independent of his mediatorial character; then they behold him to be glorious in holiness, infinite in justice, and dwelling in *light inaccessible*.—Such views of Jesus are good and proper, if they produce the happy effects of making the soul more humble, and promoting a walk and conversation, tender, reverential, and holy; but if, on the other hand, they fill the soul with dread, and slavish fear, and destroy the Christian's boldness, so that he dare not to come into his presence, then the eye of faith, whilst it surveys Jesus in the glories of his divine nature, must be directed to him as the Saviour of sinners.—Thus to look upon the Redeemer, at the same time that it keeps his people humble, increases their confidence and joy.

b. The Mediator is sometimes too much viewed abstractedly as Man.—It is true, we cannot too frequently contemplate his beauty, nor meditate enough upon him as one who is the *fairest* of the *children of men*, and as one into *whose lips grace is poured*, provided the heart be drawn out to love him with supreme affection; but Satan, that subtil adversary, may improve to his advantage our views of Christ, when confined merely to his human nature; he may tempt us either to treat him with less respect or reverence than is due to the Son of God, or attempt to

flagger our faith by suggesting that they are in a dangerous case who trust in man, since it is declared in Scripture, that *curst* is *he that maketh man his trust*,—and especially one who was *to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness*.—When such temptations occur, God's children must direct the eye of faith to Jesus in his divine character, and oppose the enemy of their salvation, saying, “ I believe in him “ as one who is not merely a man, but as one who “ is *God over all, blessed for ever*.”

c. God's children frequently contemplate the Mediator too much in his character of JUDGE, and view him only as he is described by the apostle, Heb. iv. 13, “ *Neither is there any creature that is not manifest “ in his sight; but all things are naked and open unto “ the eyes of him with whom we have to do*.—Then their language is—“ What will be our situation when “ he shall come in the clouds; when we shall be placed before him, to give an account of all the deeds “ done in the body?”—To have the eye of faith directed to Jesus, elevated on his throne of judgment, is advantageous, when it leads us to walk with a holy circumspection, from an impression that we are under the eye of him who sees all things. But our views of Christ, as Judge, must not be such that they terrify our souls and fill us with horror and dismay.—Hear what Christ says, John xii. 47, *I came not to judge the world, but to save the world*. This is not only true of his first coming in the flesh, but also of his second coming in the clouds, when he will appear to justify publicly the world of his elect.

d. Many also entertain the following erroneous sentiment; by reason of their small degree of knowledge, that they indeed have need of the Mediator to justify them before God, and deliver them from guilt, but

that being justified they must proceed to sanctify themselves. It is true, the *will* of God is our *sanctification*, and we must *work out our own salvation with fear and trembling*: but it is not the will of God that we work it out in our own strength; the Lord Jesus is made unto us of the Father, as well sanctification as justification.—This essential truth of our holy religion must always be impressed most deeply on the mind, that without Jesus we *can do nothing*, and that what we do, except it be done in his strength, cannot be either pleasing or acceptable to God.—This will excite us to consider the Redeemer as *all and in all*, and to keep our eye steadily fixed on him.

Having premised these things, we now proceed to the second subject of discussion, and,

1. We must lay down certain principles, and then,
2. We shall point out what use believers must make of Christ.

A. The PRINCIPLES we lay down are these, that if the children of God would proceed in their application to Christ, with profit and advantage to themselves, they must not only,

a. Consider CHRIST as the FOUNDATION, as the corner-stone and rock of salvation, but also as the spring, fountain, and channel, if we may use the expression, in and through which all things are conveyed to them. He is the great treasury in which all the treasures of grace are deposited. The Father hath given to him to be the *heir of all things*, that he might have the complete management of the work of salvation, and that the elect, from his fulness, might receive every needful good.

b. Those that would make a right use of Christ should know that they are united to him in the most intimate manner: for what advantage is it for us to

be assured that there is such a fulness in Jesus, if we cannot consider ourselves as interested in the same: therefore God has so ordered it, that there should exist the closest union between Christ and his people; on their side by faith, and on his side by the spirit, by which they have an interest in and a right to the whole person of Christ, his names, offices, natures, states, and all the riches and treasures which he enjoys as Mediator: for all that Christ possesses he possesses not for himself, but for his chosen inheritance. While we meet, in the word of God, with so many expressions, which, in the most pointed manner, exhibit this union,—For instance, Are believers *partakers of the divine nature*?—He is said to partake of the human, *that they might be one spirit with him*—He is a *vine*, and they the *branches*—He is the *head*, they the *members*—He the *foundation* and *corner-stone*, they the *stones which are built upon him*, and which form one building—He is the *king*, they the *subjects* of his kingdom—He the *master*, they the *servants*—He the *bridegroom*, they the *bride*, who are joined to him in the marriage covenant: now as a woman, even though she were a poor slave, being united in marriage with a king, does, in virtue of that relation, obtain a right to all that the king has—to his throne, crown, and riches, so it is with the poor sinner; by reason of this intimate union with the Lord Jesus, he possesses all his riches, and, on the same principle, has a right humbly to demand of him every thing which he needs; and this is the source from whence flows all the consolation and satisfaction which Christians enjoy; namely,

That the all-sufficient Jesus is their Jesus, and that they are interested in him.

c. To make a profitable use of Christ, the soul

must always keep in mind, that there is nothing it can need but there is in Christ an all-sufficiency to supply it, and that there is nothing in Christ, but that, in consequence of the union between him and them, they have a right unto. For, says the apostle, *all things are yours for ye are Christ's.*

B. This principle being laid down, then the soul is in a situation to make use of Christ in every point of view.

Let us now in particular shew,

1. How we are to make use of Christ, in respect to the evil which oppresses us.

2. How, in respect to our advancement in holiness and to obtaining all the blessings of grace, which we need for life, godliness, and eternal happiness.

FIRST, We must make use of Christ, the great Mediator and Redeemer, against the EVIL which befalls and oppresses us, or which we apprehend will overtake us: against all this Christ is a *shield*.

A. We must make use of him against the GUILT of sin, which often brings the soul into the deepest distress. When it beholds a holy and righteous God; when it hears the law thundering its curses against transgressors; when it feels conscience condemning it, and Satan raising his accusations, then, in the presence of God, under the sense of its guilt, it must often cry out, with David, *If thou Lord shouldst mark iniquity, Oh! Lord who should stand?* Pf. cxxx.

3. *Enter not into judgment with thy servant, for in thy sight shall no man living be justified,* Pf. cxliii. 1; and with Job, *We cannot answer thee one of a thousand,* Job ix. 3. What do believers do in such a case? Thus convinced of guilt, they go to God, in the Mediator, behind whom, as their shield, they conceal themselves, and say, “*Have patience with us and we*

“ *will pay thee all*: not with any thing which we have
 “ to bring, but in our surety, whom we have received
 “ by faith. In him *thou art well pleased*; he hath
 “ brought in a complete righteousness; and, as a
 “ righteous judge, thou wilt not demand payment a
 “ second time.”—Upon this they plead the perfect of-
 fering of Christ, and are emboldened to go into the di-
 vine presence, and enquire, “ Lord hast thou *set him*
 “ *forth to be a propitiation by faith in his blood*? Wast
 “ thou not fully satisfied when thou didst raise him
 “ from the dead? Look upon us then in the blood of
 “ thy Son;” and this wrestling and pleading the me-
 rits of Christ, and his blood, is so acceptable, that be-
 lievers are often of a new addressed,—“ Son, daughter,
 “ *be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee. I, even*
 “ *I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions, for mine*
 “ *own sake, and will not remember thy sins.*” Do the
 people of God hear the LAW thundering forth its
 curses against transgressors, and calling aloud for
 wrath and vengeance; and do they behold their guilt
 and breach of the law? here Jesus again comes as a
 shield and defence. They cannot but acknowledge,
 yea, they will confess, that they have sinned against all
 the precepts of the law, and *kept not one of them*;—
 and not only so, but they go to the Father again and
 say, “ Thou hast sent thy Son into the world, that
 “ he himself should become a curse, and thus satisfy
 “ the demands of the law: he hath *condemned sin in*
 “ *the flesh*, and fulfilled the requisitions of the law;
 “ and therefore it hath become weak. Let then thy
 “ wrath and vengeance, for which it cries aloud, that
 “ it be inflicted on us, be averted from us.”

Does SATAN, the *accuser of the brethren*, who pla-
 ces himself on their right hand, as well as he did on

the right hand of Joshua, accuse them as being unworthy to appear in the presence of God? now again the soul takes its refuge by faith in Christ, as one who hath *bruised* the head of Satan, and is *stronger than the strong man armed*. They hide behind him as their shield, that the darts of the evil one may be warded off. Does he bring their guilt to view? they in their turn set before him the *blood of Jesus Christ, which cleanses from all sin*.

Does CONSCIENCE charge them with constantly departing from God in thought, word, and deed, even when engaged in most holy duties? here again they may make use of the blood of Jesus as that which *purifies the conscience from dead works*, and as that atoning sacrifice which taketh away the sins of their holy things.

B. A child of God must make use of Christ against the POLLUTION of sin, or indwelling corruptions which remain in him. O! it is impossible for language to express, when one is led by the Holy Spirit, to look within, what an awful discovery is made; he beholds his heart to be a sink of sin: there is no devil from hell more wicked than it: there is no sin so aggravated in its nature but it will there find admission, if not preserved by the grace of God: and hence it is that all his actions are defiled; his walk and conversation is, in consequence of this, marked with a want of circumspection, and perseverance in the ways of godliness, as well as of confidence in the law. Hence, when engaged in holy duties, he wants suitable impressions of the majesty of God, and earnestness and zeal in his service; yea, of his very prayers he must be ashamed and humbled. By reason of sin, every thing he does loses its sweetness; he will view his best works as contaminated with evil, and when he weighs

himself in the balance of the sanctuary, he will readily acknowledge that, from the *crown of the head to the sole of the foot* he is *nothing but wounds and bruises and putrifying sores*. *O wretched man*, he cries, *that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?* But is this the case? the child of God can derive comfort from a believing use of Christ. Here the soul discovers that Jesus hath not only made satisfaction for the guilt of sin, but hath purchased the Spirit, to break the POWER of it in his people, and constantly to enable them to make progress in holiness.—And therefore, at the same time, that, by reason of corruptions, he goes bowed down, and is distressed and humbled, he can go, in faith, to Christ; he can lay his corrupt heart and polluted deeds before his feet, and pray, with Hezekiah, 2 Chron. xxx. 18, 19. *The good Lord pardon me that prepareth my heart to seek God, the Lord God of my fathers, though I be not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary.* The soul can further exclaim, blessed Jesus! thou wert born free from sin that I may be purified from the impurities in which I was born: thou hast purchased for thy people, the Holy Spirit, to advance them in holiness. Let that Spirit be dispensed to me in a higher degree. Thou knowest how impotent I am in myself, but with thee there is a sufficiency of strength. Let that strength go forth from thee to break the power of corruptions in my soul.

C. The children of God groan and labour under many burdens, afflictions, and distresses, yea, infinitely more than the world imagine. Afflictions, either of an external nature, as the hatred, persecutions, scoffings, and railings of the men of the world; or internal trials, arising either in themselves or in their families or relations, are often so heavy upon them,

that they must exclaim, "Our afflictions are new every morning." But to all these trials the Christian must oppose Christ, the great Mediator, viewing him,

a. As that person who hath taken away the CURSE from all afflictions, by his sufferings and death; so that the trials which believers meet with, will not operate as an evil, and prove prejudicial to them; but as events which will promote their advantage, and *work together for good* to them.

b. Yea, the Christian in affliction must consider Christ as one who underwent himself so many afflictions, and was himself a *man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief*; so that he must not think it strange, seeing his HEAD and LORD hath endured such trials, that he meets with them too. *The servant is not greater than the master; if the world persecuted him, it is not to be wondered at that it opposes, and often with violence, those who are his members; and tongue cannot express, how encouraging and strengthening it is for the soul in affliction, to fix its eye upon Christ, and to say, "Hath Jesus borne so much, and shall I, who am "his disciple, be unwilling to take up my cross."*

c. Yes, the soul must consider Christ as a *compassionate and merciful high-priest*, who, in the midst of all the afflictions of his people, casts his eye upon them; in all their distresses is distressed, and will be careful that their trials be not greater than they can bear, and that in due season they shall find deliverance.

d. Yes, as that Jesus, who places himself beneath their cross, to encourage and to comfort them—Who calls to them, saying, "*Fear not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God; I will help thee, I will strengthen thee, I will uphold thee with the*

“right hand of my righteousness.” Isaiah, xli. 10. It is not for nought recorded in sacred history, that when the first martyr, Stephen, was about to be stoned, he *lifted up his eyes and saw the Lord Jesus standing at the right hand of God*; as one ready to come to his help, and to receive his soul into glory. Acts vii. 56. Thus does Jesus stand, at the present day, at the right hand of the Father, to afford divine support to his people in all their afflictions.

D. Besides external afflictions, the people of God experience internal trials: their souls are sometimes in the dark, by reason of divine desertion, and the hidings of the face of God. Hence it is that they are in fear round about, and they must complain and say, Lam. i. 16, *Our eyes, our eyes run down with water, because the comforter that should relieve our souls is far from us.*

How can persons thus situated support themselves, and keep their heads above water, but by a believing use of Christ? By this means they discover,

a. That Christ is their king, their lord, and their head; with whom, in the most intimate manner, they are united, hath himself drunken the bitter dregs of this cup, when, in the distress of his soul, he cried out, *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?* This serves to shew them the greatness and infinite nature of Jesus' love.—They are led, from the view of this, to say, “Hath Jesus, our Redeemer, in the character of our surety, borne all this distress in his soul that we may be eternally freed from it? Has he drunken the full cup, and shall we not taste the dregs? This consideration may serve as a support to the soul in the darkest hours.

b. Again, by a believing application to the Mediator, they discover in what manner the Redeemer

conducted himself in the midst of all his trials: he continued trusting in God.—And hence we can give to the afflicted children of God no better advice than by faith to have their souls firmly directed to God, to trust in him in darkness, and with Jesus to say, *my Father and my God!*

c. Then must believers go to Jesus, and say, “O blessed Redeemer, was thy distress so bitter, and did it press thee down so low, when thou wert God, and perfectly innocent, and only suffered as our surety? consider then once how severely we must feel the stroke, who are such sinful men, who are unable to bear the Eternal’s frowns and chastising rod; and hast thou not borne afflictions to redeem thy people from them? *Let therefore, we pray thee, this cup pass from us.*”

d. They must look to the manner in which the sufferings of Jesus terminated, that they may be encouraged and comforted in their distresses: they must call to mind, that Christ’s distresses were brought to an end, and that he hath entered into his glorious kingdom; and that therefore the afflictions of the righteous shall not last forever: they shall end. Believers then may lift up their heads, and triumph, saying,

As surely as he overcame
And triumph’d once for you,
So surely ye that fear his name
Shall triumph in him too.

E. The children of God are often called to experience many and severe assaults from Satan, the prince of this world: now he seeks to stagger them, and make them doubtful with respect to their state: now

he seeks to hurry them into sin: now he injects blasphemous thoughts, so that they are sifted as wheat, and sorely oppressed. How can a soul possibly overcome such attacks but by having fellowship with the Lord Jesus? For there is no temptation, however great it may be, but Jesus has experienced it in his own person! When the tempter came to him, Matt. iv.

a. He dared to call in question his ETERNAL SONSHIP, ver. 3, *If thou art the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.* Is it then any wonder if he dared to tempt Jesus to doubt of his Sonship, that he will tempt the people of God to doubt of their being sons and daughters of God?

b. Satan dared to tempt Christ with respect to the PROVIDENCE of God; when he said, *cast thyself down*, for thou hast the promise, that the angels shall bear thee up. ver. 6. Is it then matter of astonishment, that he should endeavour to excite the children of God to distrust divine Providence?

c. Satan dared to tempt Christ to idolatry, *to fall down and worship him*, and promised to make him an ample reward. ver. 8, 9: is it then to be any longer matter of admiration, that by means of the glittering appearances of the world, he should seek so frequently to delude and carry away the heart from God, and tempt believers to worship the creature instead of the creator? How can a soul now oppose such temptations but by reflecting and reasoning thus, “Has the precious Jesus borne all these awful and severe assaults of hell? have the fiery darts, which Satan directed against him, returned into his own bosom, without injuring the Saviour? has Jesus triumphed over Satan? certainly then he will not suffer that his people, who are most intimately united to him, should, by Satan’s darts, receive any essential inju-

“ry; for Christ is the shield, behind which they conceal themselves: he hath overcome Satan, and in him they *shall be more than conquerors.*”

F. Believers must make use of Christ against the FEARS OF DEATH. It is not for language to express what distress and anxiety they experience, at times, when they contemplate the separation of the soul from the body: when that close band shall be broken, and the body laid in the grave, and become the food of worms! But there is consolation for the people of God, even in this respect: when they contemplate that Christ was himself under the power of death, but that he did not remain under its dominion, that he hath overcome and triumphed, both over death and the grave, by his resurrection: hence they see that the sting is taken from death, and that now it is the medium by which they enter into glory, and they may exclaim, “Though our bodies must remain in the grave for a season, Jesus hath sanctified the tomb to be our resting-place, and our bed-chamber for the repose of our bodies; because our Jesus hath arisen, we shall not always continue in the tomb: at the last day, the last enemy being entirely vanquished, we shall arise.”

G. Lastly, have believers to experience, at times, the greatest anxiety, in respect to a judgment to come? Are they often forced to cry out, “What will be our doom, when Jesus shall come in the clouds of heaven, and we shall stand before his dread tribunal to receive our sentence?—But here again, by making use of Christ, there is comfort for them:—Do they betake themselves to him for refuge, and receive him again as their SURETY and SAVIOUR, they may then say, “It is true, we shall also be brought before the judgment-seat of Christ; but he, who is our

“ Lord, our husband, our friend, our head, our sure-
 “ ty and Mediator, will be our judge: he who hath
 “ here clothed us with his righteousness, and hath
 “ made us to stand before God, against all accusa-
 “ tions which are brought against us, will see to it, on
 “ account of that same righteousness, that we be made
 “ to *stand in the judgment*, and will enable us, with
 “ boldness, to lift up our heads. At his bar we have
 “ not to expect a condemnatory sentence will be pro-
 “ nounced against us: no; but because he hath al-
 “ ready enstamped his image upon us, he will address
 “ us, saying, *Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the*
 “ *kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the*
 “ *world.*” Matt. xxv. 34.

See, beloved, how a believer may make use of Christ for his comfort, against all the EVILS he meets with in life.

SECONDLY, we must in this place shew how believers are to make use of Christ, in order to their advancement in grace: and here we are invited to point out what use they are to make of his names, natures, offices, and states; and how as an example, which they are to follow, with a constant renunciation of every thing in them, and a daily application to Christ and his fulness.

But on account of the extensiveness of the field before us, we shall only call your attention to the principal points under each of these heads, to shew the people of God in what manner they must make use of Christ, to promote their comfort and sanctification.

First, with respect to the NAMES which he bears: these must not be considered, so much with regard to his divine nature, as to his being Mediator and surety; and these names, as we have before shewn, are

either his common and essential names, or those which are not common to him alone. The soul that would make a right use of the names of Christ, must reflect,

1. That none of the names which he bears are given to him for nought; but to shew, that whatever those names signify and import, all is, in an infinitely higher degree, found in Jesus.

2. Believers must use these names according to the nature of their wants, and the peculiar circumstances of distress in which they are placed. For instance: is the Redeemer called JESUS? this is that name which is as *ointment poured forth*; which is as balm to their souls. When they are led to see their sins as greatly aggravated in the sight of God, then say they, we have a Mediator, whose name is Jesus, is Preserver—Saviour, who is come *to save his people from their sins*, how great, how numerous soever they may be: we need not then to despond, on account of their atrocity; but we may rest upon him as one who will also save us, though the vilest of the vile. Do the people of God reflect that he is called *Christ the anointed one*, whom God hath, from eternity, ordained, and, in time, qualified for his several offices, when he gave him the *Spirit without measure*? then certainly they can with safety confide in him; and being united to him, entreat him to bestow upon them more and more of that spirit which rests upon him.

Is he called LORD? then must their eye be upon him, as *the eye of a servant upon his master*: then it behoves them to obey his commands; yea, they may expect their final preservation.—Is his name *Counselor*? then they must, in all difficulties, go to him for wisdom and direction, agreeably to the promise, *I will counsel thee*.

But, SECONDLY, the believer must use the Media-

tor, in respect to his WHOLE person, as God, as Man, as Mediator.

1. He must make use of him as *true God and eternal life*, together with the Father and Holy Spirit,

a. To STRENGTHEN and support his faith: for because he is God, the believer may be assured that his suffering was satisfactory; and that nothing is wanting in the great point of procuring the salvation of his people: yes, on this account he is the object on whom he may rely, and to whom he may and ought to surrender himself, being fully confident that as God, he will, by his power, *keep his people*, notwithstanding every opposition, *through faith unto eternal salvation*.

b. Is he God? then the believer must walk before him in godly fear and reverence; for he, by the eye of his omniscience, both sees and knows all things.

2. The Mediator must also be considered with respect to his HUMAN nature. It is true, *we know not Jesus any more after the flesh*, still we must contemplate him as man, not so much in his mean appearance, when *he was rejected of men*; this will indeed tend to excite in us a warm affection towards him, because he condescended to stoop so low: but especially we must make him the object of our meditation, as he now appears in our nature exalted to glory; and in this view he must be used,

a. For *sanctification*; saying, "Have we such a glorious Redeemer in heaven? The more we increase in holiness, the more conformable we are to his image, the less ashamed will we be to call him our brother."

b. To make use of Christ, as seated in glory, at the right hand of God, may afford the soul a high degree of confidence in APPROACHING to the throne

of grace:—"There, says the believer, is seated my brother, who partakes of my nature, and is like unto me in all things, sin only excepted; who is touched with a fellow feeling of my infirmities, having been himself tempted as I am, and therefore I am not afraid to lay all my complaints before him."

c. To make use of Christ, as glorified, may serve to comfort the children of God. For is Christ in heaven arrayed with glory? then may they say, we shall be glorified with him: and certainly it must cheer their souls to think that Jesus, who hath taken their flesh and blood upon him; who is their head; with whom they are most intimately united, is already in heaven, and consequently may they say, a part of our flesh is there; and this is a certain pledge that we also shall ascend thither; for if the head be glorified it necessarily follows that the members shall partake of similar joys.

3. Especially believers must make use of Christ as the Mediator, GOD AND MAN IN ONE PERSON. The mediatorial work he took upon him in eternity: he hath accomplished it in time, by his active and passive obedience.—The salvation which he brought in, he hath, as the great PROPHET of his church, made known to his people: he applies it to each of his chosen, whom, one after another, he brings out of darkness into his marvellous light. Yes, he is daily employed in promoting the happiness of his redeemed, nor will he rest from his great employment, until the great body of the church is perfected. Now, are believers disposed to make a right use of him as Mediator? They must,

a. Contemplate him in these several points of view, in faith, with the deepest reverence, accompa-

nied, both with holy adoration and wonder, *for he is altogether lovely.*

b. Is he the Mediator? then he is the ROCK of salvation, on which the whole church is built; and on this the believer may rest, knowing that the *gates of hell shall never be able to prevail against it.*

c. As the Mediator, we must, by him, approach unto God, and to the throne of grace: without him we cannot have any access to God, but will find the throne always shut against us. This use the apostle will have us to make of him: for after having in an extensive manner represented him as the *great high-priest*, he concludes with these words, *Let us draw nigh with a true heart, in full assurance of faith.* Heb. x. 22.

d. Hath God the Father made in him, as Mediator, a representation of himself and of his perfections, so that Jesus could say, *he that hath seen me hath seen the Father?* John xiv. 9; then he must be the object of our serious meditation, that we may *behold, with open face, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, and be changed into the same image, from glory to glory.* 2 Cor. iii. 18.

e. We must make use of Christ in all his mediatorial relations, as our HEAD, to derive from him, continually, strength: as our HUSBAND and BRIDE-GROOM, to be preserved, defended, and provided for: as our SHEPHERD, to secure us from the attacks of that *roaring lion, who is constantly seeking whom he may devour*: as our STRONG TOWER, *into which we may run for safety* in trouble, and in times of danger: as our MERCY-SEAT, who conceals our sins from the sight of God: as our ALTAR, from whence ascends the incense of our prayers, as a sweet perfume: as our BRAZEN LAVER, to sanctify and purge

us from our sins: yes, in a word, as the WAY, the PATH, and the LIFE; without whom *no man can come to the Father*. John xiv. 6.

f. Hath Christ, as Mediator, obtained salvation, and does he apply it to the soul? we must make use of him for our CONSOLATION, as the finisher of faith, knowing that he is a faithful Saviour, who never begins a good work in any soul but he carries it on to perfection; for it is said, *he never forsakes the work of his hand*.

Thirdly, we must not only make use of Christ in his names, in his person as God, Man, Mediator, but also in his THREE OFFICES, as Prophet, Priest, and King: offices which are most necessary in the Mediator, if he shall bring sinners to God; for there are, in particular, three evils with which the sinner is oppressed: he is grossly ignorant of the way of salvation; he is GUILTY before God, and is unable to deliver himself from misery. Hence we have need of a PROPHET, to enlighten us; of a PRIEST, to pay our debts; and of a powerful KING, to break the bands of sin asunder, and bring us unto God.

Having made these several remarks, let us more minutely enquire into faith's view of the Mediator, with respect to each of these offices.

1. We must consider the Mediator as the great PROPHET of his church; one who infinitely transcends Moses, whom the Lord God of Israel had raised up for that people: he was but a *servant*, Jesus is *the lord in his house*, and excels all the prophets who have gone before him, both in his person, in the manner in which he received his knowledge, and in the way in which he dispenses it.

a. In respect to his PERSON, all other prophets were but men, simply men; in themselves ignorant

and blind; all their knowledge was derived from God: but this prophet, though a *man, is holy, undefiled, and separate from sinners*, and never was contaminated with guilt; and, what is more, he is God and man in one person; of consequence *he knows all things*.

b. Jesus, as prophet, transcends all others, with respect to the MANNER in which he obtained his knowledge. The ancient prophets derived their information by means of revelations and visions; but all that Jesus hath revealed, he had heard and learned of his Father. He was his bosom companion in the eternal counsel of peace; therefore he is the ETERNAL wisdom: and as man, the spirit of wisdom was poured upon him *without measure: hence none ever spake as this man spake*.

c. He is exalted as a prophet above others, with respect to the way in which he teaches his people. The prophets of old communicated instruction by word of mouth, and could only bring their doctrines to the EARS of men; but this great prophet brings the truth to the HEART:—his teaching is internal; he *opens the understanding*: yes, he softens the hardest hearts, and *writes his laws* in them: he directs the judgment, in the examination of revealed truths: he bows the will to embrace them in love, and he gives a desire and strength to live in an evangelical obedience to them: he makes his disciples taste, experimentally, the sweetness and power of them, so that they must exclaim, *who is a teacher like him?* But what is the use that God's people must make of such a great prophet and teacher?

a. We must receive and embrace him by faith, with holy admiration, humble adoration, and inward joy. The Father said, *this is my beloved Son, hear ye*

him. Matt. xvii. 2. We too must approve of the testimony of God, and also make him the object of our delight.

b. We must, like Mary, sit often at his feet, to be taught by his spirit, to receive the *unction from the Holy One*, by which alone *we can know all things.* 1 John ii. 20. We must therefore open our hearts, and so search after truth, that we look to him for light and ability to be led to a true knowledge of it.

c. We must submit to his instruction, although there may be mysteries in his religion which our finite minds cannot fully fathom; still we must embrace them as truths heavenly and divine.—We must receive the testimony of no one, except it agree with that which is given by Christ.—We must always examine what is truth by this standard; for the internal instructions of Christ always correspond with the doctrines of his revealed word; and therefore we must make the word the touch-stone of truth.

d. We must seek to be CONFORMABLE to Christ in his prophetic office, and to *be taught of the Lord*, agreeably to the promise, Isaiah liv. 13, *All thy children shall be taught of the Lord*, that being thus taught ourselves, we may be able also to teach others. This Paul denominates prophesying, 1 Cor. xiv. 24. Moreover, as Christ established his doctrines, when on earth, by a holy walk, so we must beautify and adorn our profession, with a life which is in unison with our profession of the truth.

2. Christ is also the great *high-priest over the house of God*; and as such we must consider him, and make a believing use of him.

a. We must *consider* him as the antitypical and true priest of the new covenant, who was shadowed forth by the high-priest of old, in his splendid vest-

ment, consecration, and in his employment. Waving for the present, what might be observed, with respect to these rituals of the Aaronical priest, we only remark, that as high-priest, it devolved on him to offer sacrifices for Israel; to pray for them; and to enter into the sanctuary, on the great day of atonement, to bless the people.

Now, as the believing Israelite, in all this, saw the true high-priest strikingly represented, so may we, who behold all these things as fulfilled, when we compare the shadow with the substance, see a bright display of the wisdom of God. Does the substance always infinitely surpass in excellency the shadow? so Christ, as a high-priest, is one whose glories far transcend those with which Aaron was adorned. Aaron was a *sinful* man, who must first atone for his own, before he could make an acceptable offering for the sins of the people: Aaron was a priest, who with strange blood entered into the sanctuary: Aaron was a priest, who, because he could not make an actual satisfaction for sin, could not say, at any period of his exercising this office, that his work, as a priest, was at an end, but must daily repeat his offerings for the people. Aaron was a priest whose intercessions were imperfect, and whose blessings were but wishes. But here, on the other hand, we behold a priest who infinitely excels in all these respects: Christ, our high-priest, is WITHOUT SIN. *Such a high-priest became us, who was holy, undefiled, and separate from sinners.* Heb. vii. 26. *wherefore he needed not to offer for himself.* Christ, our glorious priest, *hath offered himself, and by that one offering hath for ever perfected them that are sanctified: he hath not shed the blood of calves, bulls or of goats, but his own blood; that blood*

which *speaketh better things than the blood of Abel*; which does not cry for vengeance, but for pardon: so that there is no sin so great, so aggravated, of such long duration, but that blood hath efficacy to remove it: yes, Christ, our high-priest, when he intercedes, demands of his Father to bestow the blessing—his entreaties rest upon his offering made on the cross; and therefore, the *Father always heareth him*: yes, he perfumes the imperfect petitions of his people, and makes them rise a *sweet smelling savour* unto God. But what must particularly be remarked is, that Christ, our exalted priest, *LIVES* for ever, to intercede for his redeemed; that he opens his liberal hand to dispense to them all spiritual and heavenly blessings; and that, being *made perfect by sufferings*, he hath entered into the true holy of holies; not with strange, but with his own blood, that thus the way thither might be opened to his people; and that he might always appear in the presence of God, as their advocate: but,

b. We must also MAKE USE of Christ as such a glorious high-priest.

1. By an HABITUAL and DAILY flying to him by faith, as our refuge, and as the only way of salvation, we must lay upon him the hand of faith, and cast our sins upon him, as the Israelites formerly did upon the head of the sin-offering, in order, by that act, to cast upon it the guilt of the people: in like manner must we, coming unto Jesus, say, *Lord, we are oppressed, undertake for us.* Isaiah xxxviii. 14.

2. We must, with the SACRIFICE WHICH CHRIST HATH MADE, approach to the throne of grace, and plead on the strength of it, as well for the remission of daily sins, as for sanctification, saying, “O Father! hath not thy Son satisfied divine justice? Is not his

“ blood shed to pardon our daily deficiencies and departures from thee? It is true, when we survey all our infirmities and backslidings, we must stand at a distance from thee; but it is our earnest desire to wash in the blood of thy Son, which always flows; there we may, unappalled and unabashed, lift up our faces unto thee: yes, hath not thy Son also procured the spirit for sanctification, to cleanse our polluted hearts? Was not the very end which he proposed to himself in dying, that we should *die unto sin, and live unto righteousness?*” 1 Pet. ii. 14.

3. We must particularly make use of Christ as a priest, *who ever liveth to make intercession for us.* Tongue cannot express the satisfaction which the soul experiences when it views Christ as present in prayer; when it reflects that he is standing before the throne, as the antetypical high-priest; that he bears his people upon his heart; that he is so compassionate as to render our imperfect services and prayers acceptable unto God; and that he takes the names of his people upon his lips, and says, “ Father, for these I have died; for these shed my blood; let *them not go down to the pit, for I have found a ransom for them.*” Job. xxxiii. 24.

4. We must use Christ, our glorious high-priest, as the FOUNTAIN, from which spring, and the channel through which are conveyed all spiritual and heavenly blessings. For his sake God gives his people *all things richly* to enjoy, and upbraids them not. We must, therefore, as poor and naked, present ourselves before him, and open our hearts, that the streams of his grace may descend in their rich variety and abundance.

5. We must endeavour to become spiritual priests. The common priests, under the Old Testament, were

clad in white raiment : so must we seek to be beautified with the *garments of salvation, and the robe of righteousness*, without which we cannot approach into the presence of God, nor enter within the holy of holies. As priests, we must offer up ourselves unto God, and present soul and body *a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto him*. Especially we must mortify our corruptions, the *old man with his lusts*, and daily come before him with the incense of prayer; and lay it upon Christ, the golden altar of incense, *who appears before God for us* : and, as the priests under the old economy must be on their guard against being contaminated with ceremonial impurities, so must we also not only appear with a *clean heart and a good conscience towards God* ; but also we must seek to preserve our external walk from being unspotted by the world, and keep our garments from being defiled, that thus we give no offence to others who are without. But,

6. Christ is not only a prophet and high-priest ; he is also a KING : of old he was promised as a king, who should *rule from sea to sea, from the rivers to the ends of the earth*. As a king he often appeared before his manifestation in the flesh, as to Isaiah, chap. 6 ; and to Ezekiel, chap. 1.—And after his coming into the world, he appeared to John in a vision, as having *on his vestment, and on his thigh this name written, King of kings, and Lord of lords*. Rev. xix. 16. As a king he is exhibited riding in the chariot of the gospel, and with the arrows of his grace, piercing the hearts of his enemies, to make them submit to his authority, that thus they might be the objects of his care, defence, and protection.

But what is the use we must make of this King ?

A. We must be impressed with the deepest RE-

VERENCE and respect for him, as one who is invested with glorious majesty, and not only be excited to sing the praises of this king, but endeavour also to move others to extol him in the highest strains. Thus did the Psalmist, personating the bride of Christ, in the 45th. Psalm, the sentiments of which are beautifully expressed in the following lines of the poet :

Now be my heart, inspir'd to sing
The glories of my Saviour king,
Jesus the Lord ; how heavenly fair
His form ! how bright his beauties are.

O'er all the sons of human race
He shines with far superior grace ;
Love from his lips divinely flows,
And blessings all his state compose.

Thy throne, O God, for ever stands,
Grace is the sceptre in thy hands ;
Thy laws and works are just and right,
But grace and justice thy delight.

Let endless honours crown his head ;
Let every age his praises spread ;
While we with cheerful songs approve
The condescension of his love.

B. We must constantly own him to be our King. In the obedience of faith we must submit to him ; embrace him in love, and worship him. Ps. lxxv.

C. We must, with humble BOLDNESS, approach his throne, as poor and naked in ourselves, to receive those blessings of grace which he dispenses to his people ; for he is a rich, an almighty and gracious King.

D. We must daily go to him for grace and strength to OPPOSE our enemies, sin, Satan, and the world: beseeching him to destroy, more and more, the dominion of sin, the tyranny of Satan, and the love of the world, which have so much swayed our hearts; and in the room of these, to set up his own kingdom and authority; saying, in the pious and experimental language of the poet,

Now, Lord, I would be thine alone,
Come take possession of thine own,
For thou hast set me free :
Releas'd from Satan's hard command,
See, all my powers waiting stand,
To be employ'd by thee.

My will conform'd to thine would move ;
On thee, my hope, desire and love,
In fix'd attention join;
My hands, my eyes, my ears, my tongue,
Have Satan's servants been too long,
But now they shall be thine.

NEWTON.

FOURTHLY. We must also make use of Christ, with respect to his different states of humiliation and exaltation.

1. With respect to his state of HUMILIATION: When we contemplate the sufferings of the Mediator; when we follow him to Gethsemane; behold him wrestling with God; experiencing the bitterness of anguish; or when we ascend with him the mount of Golgotha, where he died a most painful, shameful, and accursed death, we obtain a most clear, lively, and affecting view of our misery, redemption, and the

gratitude we owe to God, for that deliverance; the three things which are necessary to be known for salvation. We may get some discovery of the nature of sin, by the accusations of conscience; but in all its malignity, together with the wrath of God denounced against it, we cannot have it fully exhibited, but by viewing the Son of God nailed to the accursed tree, to atone for it. Never did God manifest his justice and holiness more illustriously than when Jesus died: for, had it pleased him to have spurned from his presence the whole race of mankind, and absolutely refused ever to have looked upon them in mercy, as he has done with devils, upon their rebelling against him, we could then only have said, “God has acted the part of a righteous judge;” but now, when we behold him surrendering his beloved Son to such excruciating torments and sufferings, he exhibits an holy hatred of sin: he evidences that he cannot admit the sinner into fellowship with him, without a satisfaction be made; and thus declares, that Christ, as surety, must undergo the punishment which was threatened to be inflicted upon the workers of iniquity. If now we make a right use of the sufferings of Christ, it will serve,

A. To make lively impressions on our minds, of the ABOMINABLE AND SHAMEFUL NATURE OF SIN. Is it an evil for which there is no remission, but by the blood of the Son of God? this should excite us to a holy watchfulness against every appearance of it, lest we be overtaken by it.

B. To make us reflect upon the GREATNESS and inexpressible nature of the love of God. Where is love more clearly unfolded to us? where is it seen shining with brighter lustre than in the death of Christ? The great apostle says, Rom. v. 8, *But God commend-*

eth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners Christ died for us : and Christ himself observes, John xv. 13, Greater love hath no man than this—that a man lay down his life for his friend : for, if God had so confirmed the angels, and Adam and Eve in their state of original beatitude, that they could never have fallen : we could indeed have said, this manifested his goodness ; but we never could have exclaimed, with wonder and astonishment, God hath so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son. John iii. 16. This must excite both admiration and adoration in the soul ; being lost in this abyss of love, it must exclaim, how excellent is thy loving kindness, O God. Ps. xxxvi. 7. Yes, the heart cannot but be inflamed with love, when it reflects, and thus reasons with itself :—“ Was it for my sake that Jesus was so deeply humbled ? was it for me that he suffered, that he was bound, scourged, and crucified ? O let nothing be thought too precious to surrender to him in return.—I resign to thee, Lamb of God, my soul, my body, and all I am and have, to be employed in thy service.”

c. Such a view of Christ serves also to awaken and excite the soul to go, and to lie at the feet of Jesus, with all its sins, with all its needs, and with all its corruptions ; and to entreat him, since he is willing to redeem it from everlasting destruction, he would also be pleased, by his blood and spirit, to remove all that from it which renders it unfit to engage in his service, especially that the *old man* of sin might be crucified, slain, and buried with Christ, so that *it may also walk in newness of life.* Rom. vi. 4, 6.

2. We must contemplate Christ, with respect to his *state of exaltation,*

A. As one who HATH ARISEN from the dead. The resurrection of Christ is the foundation of our

justification, sanctification, and glorification; for, in consequence of Christ having arisen, the Father declares that full satisfaction hath been made to his injured justice, and that he can now justify the sinner who believes on him.—Yes, the resurrection of Christ teaches us, that we must rise with him, and live no more for ourselves, or in sin; but for that Redeemer who *died for us and arose again*. 2 Cor. v. 15. We must, therefore, constantly plead, that *we may know him and the power of his resurrection*. Phil. iii. 10.—And thus the resurrection of Christ will serve as a foundation, to hope for a blessed resurrection at the last day; and thus administer comfort to us whilst passing through this wilderness: for the believer may now exclaim, “Because the Head enjoys life and immortality, the members shall also live with him.”

B. Do we view him as one who hath ASCENDED INTO HEAVEN, to prepare a place for *his* redeemed, and from thence to send forth his spirit? this step of his exaltation must serve to excite our hearts no longer to seek things below, but to mount in search of those which are in reversion for the followers of Christ in heaven. Faith’s view of an ascended Jesus will lead our thoughts upwards, to things heavenly and divine, where the Mediator is, and be a mean to induce us to go to him who sits on the throne of grace, for an abundant out-pouring of his holy spirit.

c. Does Jesus SIT AT THE RIGHT HAND of God, exalted above all principalities and powers? Is he there as the great head of the church, to preserve and defend it from all its enemies, and at last to take it up to himself in glory? certainly this must serve to encourage and support believers, in all difficulties: hence Calvin once said; “*Whilst Jesus sits*

“ *at God’s right hand*, the church has nothing to fear.”¹⁹ He will never suffer the enemies of their salvation to overcome them : not one member of his mystical body ; not even the most contemptible in their own, or in the view of the world, shall ever perish ; for his *eye is ever upon them for good*. “ O encouraging, “ comfortable reflection,” may the believer now say, “ Jesus, my king, is at God’s right hand, to manage all “ my concerns ; to him I may commit the keeping “ of my soul, for I know that all his providences, and “ the ways he is holding with me, will combinè to “ bring me to himself in glory.”

Let us now, in the fifth place, see how we must use Christ as an example whose steps we are to follow : to this believers are often exhorted in the word of God.—They must *walk even as he WALKED*. 1 John ii. 6. *As ye have received Christ Jesus, the Lord, so walk ye in him*. Col. ii. 6.—*They are predestinated to be conformed to his image* ; Rom. viii. 29.—This conformity to Christ, with respect to its beginning, they obtain when Christ in regeneration impresses his image upon the soul : but in sanctification it is, that it advances more and more towards perfection.

But in what manner shall a believer make use of Christ, in this point of view ?

1. He must constantly KEEP FULL in his view that pattern of virtue which Christ exhibited when on earth, to the end that he may become enamoured with it.

2. The believer must also daily compare himself with it, and carefully examine wherein he resembles it ; or in what points there is a want of conformity to it.—The believer must, in this respect, act the part of a painter, and keep continually in his view the original or pattern.—He must consider himself as the

canvass on which the first outlines are drawn; and grace as the painting that is gradually advancing to perfection. As an holy painter, the believer must examine what touches are wanting, what strokes there are which make the resemblance less striking, and proceed immediately to amend them; and with this he will find work all his days: for the painting will not be complete until he shall be made *like unto Christ* in glory.

3. And whilst, on the one hand, in all this the soul must be as much engaged as if it were able in its own strength to accomplish the arduous work; so, on the other hand, convinced of its impotency, and that it can do nothing, it must wholly depend on the spirit and strength of Jesus; crying with that man of God; HOLY JESUS,

“ As the image in the glass,
“ Answers the beholder’s face;
“ Thus unto my heart appear,
“ Print thine own resemblance there.

“ Shew me what I have to do,
“ Every hour my strength renew;
“ Let me live a life of faith,
“ Let me die thy people’s death.”

See thus in as concise a manner as possible, this copious subject discussed; a subject which embraces the whole of practical religion.

We must now attempt to answer certain questions which may arise from what has been said; and which was the third thing proposed to be done in the present lecture.

1. It is possible some one may ask, “ Can a soul

“ be united to Christ; yea, make use of him habitually, without being assured as to its state?” We reply,

A. That fellowship with Christ MAY, and does indeed exist without the experience of assurance; for there are many who walk humbly with God, who are filled with fears: many that sincerely love Jesus, who go doubting on their way: may not those persons, on this account, make any use of Christ? certainly they may; for how, if this were not the case, could they possibly stand firm and immovable, when so many enemies combine in exerting their power to destroy?—Further, thou who proposest this query:—If thou wert to look back upon thine exercises, must thou not confess, that thou hast experienced some things which may, in fact, be called faith’s application of Christ to thyself? Hast thou not a thousand times, as a helpless creature, cast thyself at the feet of Jesus? When thou feelest thy need of light, counsel, and strength, dost thou not go to him? besides, what are those desires, those aspirations of soul after things above, but so many expressions of thy earnest wish to have Christ to be the strength of thy heart?

B. Hast thou ever found that when thou calledst upon Jesus for strength, that he left you to depart without giving you to witness his faithfulness; or rather hast thou not experienced that at such times thou wast most unexpectedly strengthened in the Lord, to discharge duties which, in thy view, were mountains seemingly impassable? Is not this an evidence that he hath *girded thee about with strength*? and, even though thou art oppressed by unbelief, hast to walk in darkness, and dost experience much distress, yet thou mayest firmly cleave to him, and meet a cordial reception from glorious Christ.

2. Another may say, "I know not but I have made use of Christ to encourage and to advance me in holiness; but still I continue the same I ever was: I do not see that I make any progress; and therefore I am afraid that I am not really united to Christ, and that I have not made a right use of him." To a person in this situation, we observe,

A. It may be that thou art, of a truth, UNITED to Jesus, although thou dost not lead a life which is marked by a becoming *zeal* and circumspection. An untender walk always will weaken Christian confidence: and it is generally observed, that from those who do not engage, with ardour, in the service of Christ, he will conceal his countenance and withhold his influences; which are the fruitful sources of the believer's joys.

B. But again; your complaint may be altogether GROUNDLESS; for in fact, we may increase actually in grace, and yet not be able to discern our progress: as the twig engrafted upon a tree, although immediately we do not discover its growth, still it is united to the tree, and receives sap and nourishment from it. Thus it may be with thee, O Christian! thou mayest be united to Christ; advance in grace; and yet not have clear views of it: or thy complaint may be occasioned by an internal view of thy corruptions and pollutions. Art thou brought to probe thy wounds deep, and to scrutinize into the evils which lurk within? then thy language is, "I have no grace:"—erroneous sentiment; thou hast grace; great grace; that which thy soul most needs: or thy complaint may arise from this, that the Lord conceals from thee thine advancement in grace and holiness, to keep thee poor and little in thine own eyes; and to make thee walk humbly with him.—O Christian! we are so

prone to idolatry, that if we always saw the good, which through grace we possessed, we would swell with pride, and become vain of our gifts and qualifications, or we would depend wholly upon our own strength to work out our salvation. But God will drive us from all these, and have us look constantly more and more to Christ; that thus we may give him the glory of all; and in his strength do all things.

3. Again, it may be objected by others, "We dare not with confidence apply to Christ; for we are yet so sinful and polluted, and Jesus is so holy and immaculate, that we are afraid we shall not be accepted of him:" but we answer,

A. Language like this bespeaks the prevalence of UNBELIEF. Will you, before you come to Jesus, be cleansed? Do you know of any help but that which is laid up in Christ? You are acting as absurdly as one would do, who, stretched on his bed, and racked with pain, were to say, "I am too sick to apply to a physician, to be healed by him; the wound is too corrupt to be cleansed." Would we not reason rather with such a person, and say, because it is thus with thee, therefore thou must make use of the means of restoration: go then to Jesus, even as thou art; it is for him to sanctify thee.

B. Have you then contemptible thoughts of Christ, as if he were one who both wanted ability and willingness to deliver you from your misery? Has he not helped all that ever came to him with a believing heart, and with a mind made willing to be helped by him?—*Go ye and do likewise*: say to him, *Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean*. It reflects the greatest dishonour on Christ to act the part you do; your conduct declares that you consider him as a Mediator who is not possessed of all requisite qualifi-

tations, at the same time that there is a fulness in him to *supply all your needs*.

4. Perhaps others may say, "We do indeed go to Christ; we fall down before him, and supplicate his grace; but we do not experience his divine influences; yea, more, he hides from us daily in a greater degree, the light of his countenance: we continue sitting in darkness: is not this an evidence that we have no fellowship with him?"

O! no. The Lord Jesus deals on this wise with his people, oftentimes to try their faith: the ways he keeps with them appear frequently to be opposed to their happiness; whilst, at the same time, he is willing to help them:—Behold an instance of this in his dealings with the *man that was born blind*—Jesus laid *clay upon his eyes*. If we had been spectators of this conduct, we would have conceived it to have been a strange mean of effecting restoration to sight: but still it was by this that the cure was produced, and the blind man discovered surrounding objects.—Jesus did this to make a more glorious display of his power. We see the same thing still more clearly exhibited in the case of the woman of Canaan; she was constantly crying, thou Son of David, *have mercy upon me*: Jesus heard her indeed, but he answered her not a word, except, *It is not meet to give the children's bread unto dogs!* an answer this which was sufficient to have discouraged her: the woman heard; she treasured the words up in her heart; and said, *of a truth Lord! the dogs may eat of the crumbs that fall from the master's table*.—This, her perseverance, was so acceptable to Christ, that at last he said, *woman, great is thy faith*. Matt. xv. 22.—If then you have not the desired answer of peace immediately, yet keep on asking; Jesus

always loves to hear the earnest solicitations of his people.

See thus the full fountain of grace and salvation, which is in Jesus opened to you! Come hither now all ye afflicted souls, who are ready to sink oftentimes beneath the burdens which oppress you. To a Jesus you may boldly go, who is able to supply all your wants, and uphold your sinking spirits.—Are ye IGNORANT? go to Jesus to enlighten you: he will; he can open your understandings, and teach you by his word and spirit. Are ye alarmed at the view of your sins? Jesus calleth unto thee, saying, *look unto me: it hath pleased the Father, that in me, the great Mediator, all fulness of righteousness should dwell.* Do ye groan under the power of your corruptions? Jesus addresseth you, saying, *come unto me, I will sanctify, and purify, and give you strength through my spirit to advance in holiness.* Are ye surrounded by many spiritual enemies? *I am the mighty God of Jacob*, who hath overcome the enemy: in a word, all that ye need is to be found in Jesus: apply then to him by faith; keep not at a distance from him, but make use of those treasures of grace which are offered to you in the gospel: come with the empty vessels of your hearts; let them sink deep in the ocean of Jesus' fulness. You must, with the bucket of faith, draw water from this *fountain of salvation*: in addition to this we observe, that it is necessary for you to have a lively sense of your inability and emptiness: then first will you see how needful it is to have Jesus for all things; and that without him you can do nothing: and further, such a view of yourselves will ardently press you forward to embrace Christ.—That which often prevents this is, that you lean too much upon your own strength. It is a truth, that the greatest saint,

as well as the one who has progressed least in grace, must acknowledge, that in themselves they have nothing—can do nothing acceptable to God—that they must wholly look off from self to Jesus, and to Jesus alone, who must save and give them strength to do that which is good. They experience, more or less, that they have never done any action with which God could be pleased: but, on the contrary, that they are contaminated and defiled by sin; yea, they are bold to confess that their very *righteousnesses are as filthy rags*. Let us now attempt an improvement of this truly interesting subject.

O! poor, ignorant, blind and careless worldlings, whoever you may be; of all those things which we have exhibited, you have no knowledge: for as yet you live without Christ; you know not what it is to be united to him by faith, nor what it means to derive strength from him. O how great is your unhappiness and misery: for as it is the height of happiness, as it is true joy to have fellowship with Christ, and to be a partaker of all his benefits, so it is misery in the extreme to be destitute of these, and to have no right to conclude that Jesus is your Saviour: for if you live without Christ you are without God, without the covenant, and without hope in the world; and your inheritance is everlasting destruction: for Christ is *the only name given under heaven, among men, whereby we can be saved*: he is the only way that leads to happiness and to God.

Or dost thou think, TEMPORARY BELIEVER, *almost Christian*, that thy state is not so awful as the ignorant and secure sinner, because of the profession of religion which thou makest; or because that in respect to externals thou equallest, yea, perhaps dost ex-

ceed the people of God? how false is thy foundation on which thou hast been building!—For whatever thou mayest be, however great thy profession, if thou hast not an interest in Christ thou art still wretched: thou hast never been properly convinced of sin, nor seen that thy best works before God are polluted.—The Mediator of the covenant hath never, in truth, been precious to thee; and though thou mayest have felt feeble wishes to have an interest in him, these were excited because thou didst feel a desire to be only delivered from the wrath of God, which thou didst behold awaiting thee, and not from a desire to be holy: and this is a clear mark that *thou hast no lot or part in him*. What then wilt thou do at the table of the Lord? for the end of that ordinance is to confirm and to seal the fellowship of believers with Christ. All that fulness which he is represented in the sacrament as possessing, is not for thee: and dost thou, notwithstanding approach? thou wilt not receive any advantage; but wilt eat and drink *judgment to thyself*.

But, PEOPLE OF GOD, we must particularly address a word to you to fill you with shame: you are, it is true, in Christ: you have an interest in all his benefits; but whence then comes it to pass that you, as branches of this vine which affords sap and nourishment sufficient, do not bring forth more fruit; that ye are so lifeless and inactive? the fault lies not with Jesus, but with yourselves; and why do you not bring forth more fruit?

1. Is it not because your hearts are too much enamoured of the world, by which the spirit is grieved, and on account of which his influences are frequently withheld? The heart of Christians is often so filled with earthly objects, with care and anxiety, that their thoughts cannot be set upon heaven.

2. You do not make that believing application by faith to Christ, to which you are called: it may be that you make a general use of him; but you do not apply to him with respect to all the individual acts of your lives, the diseases under which you labour, and the particular sins which you have committed, saying, "Great Redeemer! this sinful act troubles me; here the wound bleeds; this burden oppresses me: O give me grace and strength to overcome sin, and all the evils which have overtaken me, *for thou art able.*"

3. You undertake to do things, too much depending on thine own strength; you are not sufficiently acquainted with your impotency, and that without Christ you can do nothing: and therefore you are put so frequently to shame. A view of yourselves which is the reverse of this; a feeling sense of your being unable to help yourselves, and an earnest look unto Jesus, would soon lead you to discover, that in your weakness he will perfect strength.

4. You do not, as you ought, lay open your empty and barren souls before the fulness of Christ, that he may fill them; you are not sufficiently anxious to obtain his divine influences; you are inclined to live too much without Christ: and is it then strange that he does not bestow upon thee more of his saving benefits, and that you bring not forth more fruit? O come, *lift up the hands which hang down, and let the feeble knees be strengthened.*—You are now again invited to the table of the covenant; there the fountain of salvation will again be opened to supply every want: there Christ is to be seen in all those respects in which we have exhibited him to you, pictured to the life; there is to be beheld in his names, in his glorious offices, in both his natures and states in which

he procured and applies salvation.—Approach then to him with confidence; let not unbelief, or any ill-grounded anxiety keep you back; Jesus offers himself and all his fulness to you; *open your mouths wide, he will fill them*; and though you cannot come with boldness, yet come with a distressed heart, with a weeping eye and trembling hand.—If you do but desire Christ you will be an acceptable guest at his table; although you must exclaim, “ Lord we *believe*; *help our unbelief*.—Yet that *voice is sweet, that countenance is comely*; and, although it should not please him to meet with you, consider it an honour and your highest privilege that you may continue waiting upon him; go out to meet him; cordially surrender yourselves to him; and, with a believing heart, embrace him as your Lord, your all: then may you be assured that Jesus, who is here made unto you *wisdom, righteousness and sanctification*, shall be made unto you also complete *redemption*: when, having subdued all your enemies, he shall introduce you into that glory *which he hath prepared for all that love him*.

AMEN.

T H E

PIOUS COMMUNICANT.

Lecture XII.

ON THE PREPARATION OF THE HEART, WHICH
IS NECESSARY, IN ORDER TO A PROFITABLE
APPROACH TO THE TABLE OF THE LORD.



MUCH of the profit and blessing to be derived from the use of the holy sacrament of the Lord's Supper, depends on a due preparation for an attendance upon it. With that preparation many pious souls have but little acquaintance; we therefore conceived it would be of use in this lecture to attempt to throw light on a subject of such importance to the Christian in every period of the life of faith. Let it, however, be previously remarked, that we propose not to discuss this point in the most extensive manner, as much has already been written upon it; neither shall we enter upon the three principles of self-examination laid down in the Heidelbergh catechism, and mentioned also in the form of administration of that ordinance; but we shall immediately address ourselves to those who are partakers of the life of grace in their souls, with a view to give them some direc-

tions how they must conduct themselves in preparing for an approach to the table of the Lord; which will be acceptable to God and profitable to their own souls. To this end, we shall,

1. Shew the necessity there is for believers to prepare for commemorating the dying love of Christ in the sacrament.

2. Point out some of the obstacles which prevent Christians from engaging in such preparation, and attempt to remove them out of the way.

3. We shall endeavour to shew, in what consists a due preparation for the Lord's supper, and give some directions concerning it.

4. We shall attempt to remove the difficulties which might be raised from any thing which may be advanced in the course of this lecture.

FIRST, We remark that a preparation of heart is NECESSARY, previous to coming to the table of the Lord; and that for the following reasons:

1. Although we may be real Christians; although we be, in truth, in covenant with God, and partakers of faith, yet still it is certain, whilst we are upon earth we are and we continue sinful: although we may have engaged to be for God, and for his service, yet an hundred things may intervene to draw off our minds from a service and employ so reasonable and delightful in its nature.—The heart of man is as a weight of lead, which is always inclined naturally to descend to the earth, and there is a necessity that it be constantly drawn upwards to heaven: hence it is no uncommon thing that an estrangement takes place between God and the soul. Now shall we hold more intimate communion with God, by means of this seal of the covenant: what is more necessary, as we have to do with a holy God, than that we seriously reflect

and consider in what particulars we have sinned against him, and also how far we have strayed from God; and further, that we confess our backslidings, lest they cause the Eternal to hide his face from us.

2. Is a preparation of heart necessary, in order to assist us in the discharge of the principal duties of Christianity? in like manner it is requisite that our hearts be prepared to meet the Eternal in this holy ordinance; for in the sacrament of the supper, God appears as the God of the covenant, who will hold the most intimate fellowship with his people: here the eye of faith beholds the Lord Jesus offering himself with all the riches of his all-sufficiency to his redeemed: here he exhibits of anew his willingness, as the bridegroom, to espouse them as his bride, to himself, and to bestow upon them all his treasures.—If then they approach to him in this ordinance, certainly it is reasonable that they, on their side, be satisfied; that they are willing and inclined to give themselves over to the Lord, in the covenant; and how can they be convinced that this is the case but by a pious and faithful examination of their hearts, as in the immediate presence of God himself?

3. Is it not necessary to have the heart prepared to approach the supper, when we consider that the Lord Jesus, the great Master of the feast, is himself present, to survey with his omniscient eye, which tries the hearts and the reins, the guests who are seated around his board, whether they are arrayed with the true wedding garment, and whether they have approached with suitable exercises? Ought not the conviction that Jesus was present, excite in the soul an anxiety, an ardent desire to be in such a frame as would be acceptable and pleasing to him?

4. To have the heart prepared, is a duty which is

often enjoined upon us in the word of God. Job xi. 13, *If thou prepare thine heart, and stretch out thine hands toward him.*—Paul addresses the Corinthians, saying, 2 Cor. xiii. 5, *Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves;* and this in a particular manner will he have them to do with respect to the Lord's Supper; 1 Cor. xi. 28; *Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup.*

5. To have the heart prepared when we wait upon God at the Redeemer's table, is attended with peculiar advantages to the people of God. When believers have been engaged in preparing to meet their God, previous to the administration of the ordinance, they have in their sweet experience generally found that God has been present with them in a remarkable manner, manifesting his love, and, as it were, saying, "As ye have been taking me for your covenant God, and in secret have declared that ye *are my people*, so I will betroth you unto me for ever, in righteousness and judgment, in faithfulness and in loving kindness, and declare that *I will be your God*; and as a further testimony of this, I now put the seal into your hands." But if, on the other hand, they at any time have approached without due preparation, and in a careless manner, what reason have they had of complaining of their deadness, and of their want of zeal and affection.

6. Preparation for the Lord's Supper has been practised among Christians in the former ages of the church, and they were peculiarly attentive to this part of duty.—It is true, in the times of the apostles this was not so necessary; for it appears that then the zeal and ardour of Christians were so great, and their walk so tender and circumspect, that they were always in a

situation to commemorate Jesus' dying love; therefore the table was every week spread, and on every returning Sabbath believers ate and drank in remembrance of him: but no sooner did this zeal begin to cool in the church, than particular seasons for preparation for the ordinance were set apart; and previous to the administration of this sacrament, the practice of delivering sermons applicable to the occasion was first introduced.

Our SECOND subject was to point out and to attempt to remove some of the obstacles which hinder the people of God in preparing to meet with their Redeemer at the holy supper.

1. There is no greater obstacle in their way, nor any thing hinders the progress of believers in making a suitable preparation than this, that they seek, by every mean, to put off from time to time commencing this important business: "at some future period," say they, "we will begin to prepare; it is yet time enough:" although the ministers of the gospel, with a view that they might prepare to meet their God, have already for some weeks given public notice of the time of the administration of the ordinance, yet they say, "we cannot undertake it now, but in the following week we will certainly begin."—It arrives; they again postpone it from day to day; they have many avocations; they cannot think of doing it in the midst of their pressing cares; the consequence is, that it often happens that they have not left for preparing, perhaps not a single day, yes, perhaps not even a single hour. Would to God that his people would learn to consider this habitual procrastination as a secret artifice of Satan; that they would be continually upon their guard against his temptations,

which tend to excite them to put off to a future day their preparing for commemorating the love of their dying Lord; and that they would redeem that precious time, which God in his providence is affording them for this purpose.

2. But when they are hindered providentially by a necessary attention to their worldly concerns, then Satan, that cruel and artful enemy, brings another obstacle in the way, and endeavours to make the Christian believe that it is NOW TOO LATE; and that there is more work to do than can be done in so short a time.—The language of the tempter is, “If thou wilt now *prepare*, the work will be altogether in vain: thou oughtest to have improved thy time better.” By this mean the heart is disturbed, and the time which they still would have, passes by, and the solemn business is not entered upon.—The same artifice he uses when first the sinner is converted to God: as soon as the sinner begins to think that he must change his ways, in order to please God, then says he, “it is yet time enough; thou art still young, and health blooms on thy countenance.”—But does the sinner listen to his voice, so sweetly charming, and does he postpone to some *more convenient season* seeking an interest in Christ, then the language of Satan is, “Now it is for ever too late; thou hast waited too long;” and thus the poor sinner becomes filled with sore distress, and is afraid to go to God.—The same artifice he yet employs, especially in the matter of preparation for the Lord’s table: for as he knows how great the comfort, and how inexpressible the satisfaction which arises from having the heart prepared and exercised in a suitable manner, he therefore endeavours to make believers trifle with their time, and suffer it to pass on insensibly, without a becoming im-

provement of it.—And is their time thus taken up with every thing but that to which they ought most to attend? then he so disturbs their souls that they are rendered incapable of attempting to do that which otherwise they might have commenced with profit in the strength of Jesus: we believe many can attest the truth of this from their own experience: and is this the case with you? humble yourselves before the Lord, on account of your being so deeply immersed in earthly concerns, that you have so little time left for God: but still let not your confidence be shaken; improve the few moments you may have left, and if you cannot engage in all the parts of preparation, attend to the most necessary, and thus disappoint the adversary of your souls.

3. If we attentively investigate the conduct of the enemies of our salvation, it will be found that they are never more active in seeking to draw off the heart from God, and to place obstacles in the way of the Christian, than either immediately before or at the administration of the Lord's Supper.

The DEVIL, who, as he is always going about seeking to lead by his artifices and temptations believers astray, evidences also his enmity, when they would prepare to come before their God by an approach to the holy supper. Do the people of God retire in secret and separate themselves from the world, and enter into the presence of the Lord? at such times he is busy to disturb their minds, and oftentimes to cause their thoughts so to wander and be scattered, that they cannot, with any satisfaction, engage in secret prayer or other becoming exercises. As the communion Sabbath approaches, he seeks to make them dread its arrival, and tempts them to view it as a day of sadness instead of contemplating it as a day of sa-

tisfaction and delight.—They dare not form a judgment with respect to their state, but are tossed on the tempestuous ocean of unbelief, and thus become unfit for every duty.

The WORLD set in motion by Satan, next comes forward, and brings every difficulty in the way to hinder the people of God in preparing to draw nigh to him in the sacrament.—Is it not oftentimes found; that about the time when this ordinance is to be administered, the ONE or the OTHER thing arises, and disturbs the soul; and a variety of circumstances take place, which, at other seasons, never once entered into the believer's thoughts: by this means his mind is distracted and led off from God; and thus again he is unfitted to engage in the work of preparation which is so interesting and important.

Against the WORLD the children of God must especially be on their guard, as against a most artful and designing enemy.—They ought not to yield to its allurements, but endeavour through grace to resist it: for the more they yield to its seductions, the worse it will be for them. Let them then, as much as possible, lay aside the objects of time, seeing that NOW they are called to engage in business of infinitely more importance.

Yes, SIN, which *dwelleth in us*, is not inactive: it often is observed, that the soul, about the time of communion, falls into this or the other sin; then it is immediately disturbed: then its confidence is gone: then it dares not go to God: then it knows not where to begin, and is despondent instead of arising and returning to the Lord by confession and repentance.

Does any person ask, “what must I do, and how act, when assaulted by all these enemies?” We advise you,

a. Not to be alarmed beyond measure when they thus make opposition to you; consider that they always shew their enmity most when thou art seeking to destroy their power. Set thyself, Christian, in battle array against them, and by every mean endeavour to overcome them.

b. Dost thou find thyself unable to make a complete resistance? look up to God; call in the strength of Christ; seek to strengthen thy heart with grace: acknowledge that thou hast need of support from the Lord; and go forward to the combat in the might and power of Jehovah alone.

c. And if it so happen, that the one or the other enemy obtain any advantage over thee, still let thy courage be kept up, and be not too soon nor too much disheartened; but consider with thyself that, as upon all thy duties, thou must write, "*I AM UNQUALIFIED to discharge any of them aright, in consequence of sin, which continues to cleave to me;*" in like manner, conscious of thine inability to meet God acceptably at his table; in the strength of thy Master, prepare to approach the ordinance, with a view of seeking to obtain a sense of pardon, and also strength to resist sin, Satan, and the world.

4. Another obstacle which prevents the people of God from a suitable preparation, is, that many are in the sinful practice of keeping away from the table of the Lord for the most trivial reasons. The one has a controversy with his neighbour; another is in distressed external circumstances, which wholly occupy his soul. A third has so much temporal business on hand that he can take no time for retiring alone, for the purpose of engaging in this work.—A fourth has to wrestle with this or with the other corruption which he cannot overcome, and this prevents the ex-

ercise of confidence : a fifth feels himself not in a becoming frame ; he is dull and lifeless ; and on this account is in fear lest his heart is not sincere, and doubts of his right to the ordinance.—What is the consequence of this ? they each determine not to approach, and thus conceive that there is no immediate need to prepare for it. But we ask you,

a. Should such things hinder you from discharging your duty to your Redeemer God ? does it lay with yourselves to go or to stay from the Lord's table ? hath not the Lord Jesus said, *do this in remembrance of me* ?—And are you then at liberty to neglect this sacrament ? would not this be to disobey the dying command of your Jesus ?

b. And although it were true that you were kept back by reason of lawful impediments, still, on your side, you ought to endeavour to be prepared ; your souls ought to experience sorrow, because of your being prevented from drawing near : but besides this, it behoves you to be much alone, and renew your obligations to be the Lord's, and with patience wait to see what God will do.

5. But, says another, “ even though I would prepare to approach the table, yet I am so unfit for the work that I know not where to begin or where to end : when I set myself about it, then I stand at a loss how to proceed :” but neither does this discharge thee from thy duty ; thou hast sufficient opportunity of being instructed in this matter, and thou art bound to make it thy business to ascertain what is required of thee.—Or is it true that thou art ignorant, and hast but little opportunity to exercise thyself in this work ? we remark, that the Lord does not demand of thee what he requires of others, who have enjoyed greater advantages : but still it is thy duty to evidence that

thou art sincere and in earnest.—Say then, “ I will present myself unto God; I will fall down before him with all my sins; and come before him just as I am, and declare before him that I delight in him, and that he is my witness how ready I am to have the preparation of heart to meet him.—I will look to him for his spirit and strength to influence my soul.”

In this way thou wouldst manifest thy sincerity; and the Lord, who knows all thy circumstances and frames, would not leave himself to be without a witness.

6. Lastly, another perhaps will say, “ I have indeed been engaged in preparation, and I conceived I was in a good frame: I was lively and animated, and yet when I came to the table I experienced but little benefit: it was as if every thing was taken from me; and again I went forward, without preparation, and I enjoyed such comfort that I could say, it was good for me to be there: would it not then be better that I should go to the table again, unprepared as I am to approach? for I see that my comfort in going forward does not depend on my having made great preparation.” We reply to this question, that it is both sinful and extremely absurd to reason in this manner: would a son who has deserved the rod at his father’s hand, but, instead of being chastised, receives from him caresses and the most gentle treatment, abuse the kindness of his father, and say, “ Because my father hath been so gracious and kind, I will go on opposing his commands, and continue to merit his displeasure.” Ought not his tenderness rather to produce shame and confusion of face, and excite a more faithful discharge of his duty? and shouldst thou then say, that because God, thy Father, when thou camest unprepared, hath embraced thee in the most affectionate man-

ner, "I will, without giving myself the trouble of preparing, always go thus to the table?" To reason and to act in this way, bespeaks a want of affection, and the basest ingratitude.

Dost thou then ask, why is it that the Lord meets in love at times with one who is unprepared, whilst others are left to experience barrenness and much lifelessness, after having striven to the utmost to prepare to meet their God? Jehovah hath holy reasons for dealing with his people after this sort.

a. God designs, by such a conduct, to glorify in the highest the sovereignty of his grace; for, were he always to meet in friendship with his children, when they supposed that they had prepared their hearts to meet him, they might be induced to think that the blessing depended on that circumstance; but now he will shew them that whilst they are bound to the means, he himself is free to impart his grace to whom and whenever it shall please him.

b. On the contrary, he meets with the soul when it is not prepared with the preparation of the sanctuary, to make it ashamed of its conduct by his kindness to it. His tender conduct speaks this language; "Have I given thee to enjoy so much of my favour before thou soughtest me? what grace hadst thou not reason to expect, if thou hadst evidenced that my favour had been thy greatest desire?"

And therefore let no one consider this method of God's dealing, as an excitement to carelessness: we are always bound to use the means, and leave the blessing for God to bestow, in his own best time and way.

We have thus seen the hindrances which are in the way of the people of God, to keep them from pre-

paring for the Lord's Supper, and have also endeavoured to remove them.

Let us now examine our THIRD subject, which was, to give some directions with respect to those things with which we ought to employ ourselves in preparing for the holy sacrament of the supper. It must be, however, previously remarked here, that it is not our intention to raise difficulties in the mind of any person; and therefore let none be filled with any apprehensions that he hath not come aright to the table of the Lord, because he may not have been exercised just in the same manner as we are now about to point out.—We only intend to exhibit to you the means which ought to be used, without asserting that every child of God, in every case, is absolutely bound to them: for possibly the situation and circumstances of many will not admit the observance and trial of them all.—If we are conscious that our omitting to use them proceeds not from negligence and inattention, we may be satisfied; for the Lord knoweth the heart.

In speaking on the subject before us, we shall attend to the five following things:

1. Enquire whether it be useful and necessary to set apart a particular day for FASTING and prayer.

2. Mention some things which ought to be the subjects of our holy meditation when we engage in preparing for the supper of the Lord.

3. Shew that the principal part of this preparation consists in a solemn renewal of the covenant with God.

4. Enquire whether it would be useful to keep an account or register of our experiences between one communion Sabbath and another.

5. Shew how we ought to be adorned in order to

meeting with the Lord in a becoming manner at his table.

FIRST, Do any ask whether it would be useful for a Christian, before, and on the OCCASION of the administration of the supper, to set apart a particular day for fasting and prayer, and for humbling himself before the Lord? we answer the question in the affirmative: but lest any should be unnecessarily alarmed at this assertion, we must observe, that we are aware that there may exist many difficulties, which may prevent the discharge of this duty.—For instance, it will be said, “This duty may easily be attended to by the head of a family; but, in case he is not one that fears the Lord, and any of the inferiors in the same house attempt to engage in it, they would meet with much opposition: yes, they would be frequently ridiculed, treated with contempt and scorn, and be viewed by others as hypocrites.”—Under such circumstances the observance of such a day would be rather prejudicial than advantageous.—To those who are thus situated, we remark, that every one must duly attend to his peculiar situation, and consider the station and relation in life in which the Lord hath set him. If the observance of a day of fasting and prayer would not tend to advance the glory of God, it is best to omit it: but, if we earnestly desire to set apart such a day, and we cannot do it in as public a manner as we would wish, without giving offence, we ought still to do it more privately: for, in fact, the more secretly it can be done, the better; and the more pleasing it will be to God. We may engage in the business of our families, and take care of our temporal concerns as usual; and yet, at the same time, the heart go out to God in prayer and supplication: and, although the world should notice that

our hearts were affected and tender, no matter; or rather, so much the better; for then, without speaking a word, we would be able to convince them of the cause.—We see a lively instance of this in Nehemiah; when his heart was overwhelmed with sorrow, and his soul was engaged in prayer to his God, he did not say, “I cannot any longer be the king’s cup-bearer;” but he continued faithful in the discharge of his duty to his sovereign; and when the king saw that his countenance exhibited marks of a distressed mind, he asked him the reason: at that very time his heart was engaged in prayer: see Neh. ii. We may do the same.—Let us set apart a day for ourselves, and seek to bring and keep our hearts in a praying frame: on such occasions let us take less food than usual: if we cannot altogether abstain from our daily work, let us take as much time as possibly we can to be in secret with our God, and thus shew to him, even though it should be but for a few moments, our countenances confess before him that he is the desire and the delight of our souls.—None can tell but those who have experienced it, how agreeable it is to be thus exercised alone with our God: to pass a day, previous to our commemorating Jesus’ dying love, in fasting and prayer, is useful; for we evidence, by the observance of such days, that we desire to be humbled before God, on account of the sins of our lives and of our hearts: but this duty, alas! is too much neglected.—Yes, by too many it is not even thought of, except only on the occasion of observing those days which are publicly appointed by the magistrate.—That it is a duty, not only the saints under the Old, but also those under the New Testament have taught us.—The Lord Jesus indeed condemned the impious fasts of the Pharisees, but, at the same time, he gave

directions as to the manner in which men ought to fast, and thus taught us that it is a duty which is obligatory upon Christians. Matt. vi. 16, 18.—The apostles, on particular occasions, *prayed to God with fasting*: and Paul, in his epistle to the Corinthians, also shews that it was practised by the church. 1 Cor. v. 7.—The primitive Christians were much engaged in this work: but since zeal and earnestness in religion have so much departed from the church, this useful part of divine service is, alas! awfully neglected.

And, can any reason be assigned, why fasting and prayer should not be useful on the occasion of the Lord's Supper, since, by reason of sin, there exists such a distance between God and the soul? How reasonable is it to confess our departure from the Lord, and to humble ourselves in the lowest dust before him! If we observed more the duties of fasting and prayer, we would not only evidence the sincerity of our profession, and our anxious concern for enjoying the favour and presence of God in our approach to the table, but we conceive that God himself would, on his part, make more frequent and more full discoveries of his gracious presence to the soul.

But, notwithstanding we recommend the observance of those duties, we would remark, that we ought to conduct ourselves, in the discharge of them, with circumspection, according as time and opportunity permit.

Neither must any person think, that because he hath never set apart such a day, he therefore hath not attended the Lord's table with profit and advantage. A sentiment of this kind is absurd in the extreme: for we have already asserted, that fasting and

prayer are at best but means, and not so absolutely necessary, that, unless we use them, we cannot receive the blessing.

Is it now asked by any person who is inclined to engage in these duties, and finds that he can perform them in his family or in private, without being interrupted, “How he may, with the most advantage, conduct himself on a day of fasting and prayer?”—we answer, that he may best pass the day on this wise: It may be begun with social prayer; in which the sins, especially those of the family, must be confessed, and the soul be led to look for pardon and forgiveness in the blood of Christ:—which should be accompanied with renewed resolutions, in the strength of the Lord, to walk more tenderly before God. In the next place, each member should seek to animate and quicken the other by pious conversation, and by singing the praises of God, in *psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs*. This being done, let each one retire in secret:—having entered into his closet, let his heart be raised up to God, to seek his assistance and divine influences:—then let him enter upon a faithful examination of himself:—after such examination, it will next be proper to confess all those sins with which he finds himself to be chargeable before the Lord,—the hidden sins of the heart, with the innumerable transgressions of his life, the small advancement he has made in grace; in a word, all his sins, known and unknown, in all their aggravated circumstances, must be laid open before God:—with humility the gracious pardon of them must be sought; and with earnestness, renewed grace, to mortify remaining corruptions, must be solicited. Again, on such a solemn occasion, a portion of the time should be employed in reading the word of God, or the writings of pious

and experimental men;—but above all, a renewal of covenant with God, by a solemn surrender of the soul to him, should not be neglected. These secret duties having been attended to, let the exercises of the day terminate with social prayer.

Were we thus to conduct, we would evidence that God was our chief joy, and his service our supreme delight. The reasons why persons are so opposed to observing such days, are, because the work appears too arduous, and they feel in themselves an unfitness to engage in it. But, be assured, if we only were to commence it, in the strength of the Lord, we would not find it so difficult as we have conceived it to be, but would experience much comfort and joy in its prosecution.

The second thing which we asserted to be necessary and useful, in preparing for an approach to the table of the Lord, was, holy MEDITATION on subjects heavenly and divine.

This is a duty, at all times necessary. We must not only engage in it on particular occasions, but it ought to be made the business of every day. We are of opinion, that if a person has but one half an hour to retire in secret to pray, it would be profitable that the one half of that period be spent in holy contemplation and self-converse: for, coming immediately from our worldly employment, the mind is not suitably prepared to address the throne of grace;—the thoughts have need to be collected, and called in from wandering to the ends of the earth. Is it not, then, reasonable, before we come into the presence of God, that we consider the solemnities in which we are about to be engaged;—that we call to mind the majesty of that God, into whose presence we are about to enter;—that we reflect on our unworthi-

ness;—and enquire, with becoming seriousness, what it is we want of the Lord? If such meditation be necessary every day, it must be especially so, on the occasion of approaching the table of the Lord.

But to this, many will object,—“ We have no qualifications to engage in such meditation: we know not where to begin, nor where to end: and were we to undertake it, it would be in a manner so confused and irregular, that it would not be acceptable to God; and we ourselves would not derive any benefit from it.”

But on this we remark, that it may be that you are ill qualified to engage in a work of so great importance; but is this a reason why you should wholly neglect the duty? When you were first converted to God, were you then qualified to pray, and did you there think it proper to neglect calling upon your God? Certainly not. Did you not then wrestle with God day after day? Were you not then frequently engaged in pleading for grace, even though you had never learned nor known before what prayer was? Who taught you then to pray, but God himself, by his Spirit?—Well—That same God can and will qualify you to discharge this Christian duty also. Only seek him for his aid, and apply to the work, depending on him for succour in every part of it.

Do you ask for counsel and direction, in what manner you may engage and proceed in this business with profit?—We answer:

1. There are many books written on the subject of the Lord's Supper: take up some one of them, and select such parts from it for perusal, as are most useful to assist you in your meditations: read them with attention, again and again. Or you may re-

ceive assistance in this work from your fellow Christians.

2. When you have fixed on a suitable subject for meditation, immediately reflect with seriousness and care upon it; but never attempt it without prayer and supplication to God for his help, acknowledging, at the same time, that you are insufficient of yourselves to discharge any duty, much less one, which in its nature is so interesting and important.

3. And, do you say that your thoughts are constantly diverted, now by this, and presently by a circumstance quite different; in consequence of which every thing is confusion within?—or that, when retired alone, you are unqualified for meditating, through sluggishness and inactivity of body? To remedy this evil, it might be proper to pursue your meditations while you walk your chamber; and, to prevent wandering thoughts, it might be profitable to mingle with your meditations, mental prayer to God, converse with yourselves, or with a Christian friend. And we may venture to assure you, that they who attempt holy meditation, notwithstanding bodily indispositions of this kind, would soon discover, that *God will not leave himself without a witness*, but give them the strength which they need, for the discharge of a duty of so much moment.

Do you now ask, “What ought to be the subject of our pious meditations, that our thoughts may be profitably employed?”—

Here a wide field opens to our view; and such an abundance of matter presents itself, that, in replying to the question, many things must necessarily be omitted, which it might otherwise be useful to mention. We will, however, call your attention to the

following particulars, as subjects proper for meditation, previous to an approach to the table of the Lord.

1. Divine and revealed truths in general.
2. Those in particular, which respect the Lord's Supper.
3. Those which regard ourselves.

First, with respect to divine and revealed truths in general. Let the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, as each one of these divine persons is exhibited in the plan of grace, become the subject of your serious and frequent contemplation.

1. Meditate, before your approach to the table, much upon GOD the FATHER, who, though he is exalted infinitely above us and all creatures, and is so full of majesty and glory, that man cannot add any thing to render him more perfect,—yes, who is so holy and righteous, that in virtue of his holiness he must have punished the sinner with eternal destruction from his presence,—yet he hath had from eternity such thoughts of love and compassion towards the transgressors of his law, that he hath chosen some of them, in Christ, to be *vessels of mercy*, and given them to his Son, that he, as surety, might redeem them;—that he hath made known, in time, this eternal purpose of grace, and revealed himself to be a God of salvation, who will glorify all his perfections in promoting their felicity;—that he hath sent his Son, his only begotten and beloved Son, into the world, the consideration of which made Christ himself to exclaim with astonishment, *God hath so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son!* John iii. 16. Contemplate this love; it may, as it often does, produce the happy effect of making your hearts go out in returns of love to him.

2. Attentively consider the Lord JESUS. Behold! how from eternity he undertook to be our surety, and said; *Deliver them from going down into the pit: I have found a ransom*, Job xxxiii. 24;—how for the love he bore to sinners, he came into the world, *in the form of a servant*, and took upon him our flesh and blood; yes, how he suffered and died, that he might redeem his people from everlasting death! Contemplate him in his mediatorial perfections and beauty—*He is altogether lovely*; lovely in his PERSON, in his NAMES, OFFICES, NATURES, and STATES;—lovely in all his riches and benefits which he bestows. When you have duly considered each of these subjects, you will find matter sufficient for meditation.

3. Consider God the HOLY GHOST. Call to mind, that it is he who applies to each of the elect, from time to time, the salvation purchased by Christ; that it is he who makes those who are dead to arise to life, who brings those that are afar off near to God, who unites them to Jesus, and puts them in possession of all those blessings which he hath purchased for them.

Having thus meditated on the triune God, let your thoughts next run upon the covenant of grace, with its appendages. Consider the PARTIES; the ever blessed God, and the poor sinner; the MEDIATOR in all his glories, in his ability and willingness to save sinners; the SPIRIT, as one who inclines the sinner to accept of the covenant. The TERMS of the covenant, how reasonable! how suitable! how necessary! The PROMISES, how delightful, comfortable, and calculated to support the soul! The SEALS of the covenant, what sure and excellent means to animate, to keep alive the principle of faith! Consider

also, with peculiar care, the SEAL which is exhibited in the Lord's Supper, and reflect :

1. What a great and precious privilege it is, that you, who are so miserable, dead, and deserving of destruction, are not only invited to enter into covenant with God, but that Jehovah himself will even put into your hands the signs and seals, and, as it were with an oath, swear to be *your God*.

2. Yes, that he invites you to that feast, which is for his friends alone;—where you may hold communion with the triune God, with all the saints on earth, and with the saints who are already around the throne above; in a word, to that feast which is a prelibation of heaven, of the *marriage supper of the Lamb*, and at which he entertains his bride with the blessings of his kingdom.

3. Would you see a lively representation of the THREE principal points of our holy religion,—our misery, redemption's glorious plan, and the gratitude which is due from man to God for it?—these you may discover in the Lord's Supper. In the BREAKING of bread, behold your misery, how richly you deserved to be broken, and how Christ, in order to redeem from destruction, must be himself broken for you. In the RECEIVING and EATING of the bread, and in the DRINKING of the wine, you are admonished, that you must receive Christ, and be united to him by faith, in the most intimate manner, even as the bread and wine are united to your bodies. And as it is becoming that we should honour those whose bread we eat, so in the holy Supper we are taught, that Christians are obligated to honour Christ, spread his praises abroad, and be *holy as he is holy*. And in the same way, in the ordinance of the supper, the exercised believer may find a short sketch of

all the truths which God has revealed respecting the redemption of fallen man. Are you unable to meditate upon all these truths, with application to yourselves? let not this impede your progress; but go on. God may perhaps meet with you when thus engaged, and speak peace to your souls.

But it has been intimated, that Christians may find matter for meditation in THEMSELVES.

Go back to the period when God first met you with his preventing grace. Consider how he wrought in your souls. Call to mind all the particular experiences which you have had since you have been travelling heaven-ward. How often has God manifested his love to you, and made you taste of his favour! How often he has delivered you from your difficulties! How often, in darkness and distress, he has guided and directed you! When you deliberately reflect on all these things, you will have abundant cause of erecting your *Ebenezers*, your *stones of help*, and of saying, *Hitherto hath the Lord helped us*. The Christian who often meditates on God's dealings with his soul, will, on the one hand, find much reason of gratitude; and, on the other, great cause of shame for having fallen so far short in the duties of his holy religion.

But perhaps some AFFLICTED souls will say,—
“This would be all well, if we durst believe, that
“we of a truth had grace. But this is a cause
“of our distress: we are afraid we have it not; and
“therefore are impeded in our meditations, inas-
“much as we dare not make application of those
“truths to ourselves.”

This consideration may, indeed, prove an obstacle in the way: but perhaps you make trial of your state by beginning with the highest degrees of grace, instead

of commencing at the lowest, and thus gradually ascend to a degree which is more advanced. For instance :

1. Have you been born in a land where the gospel is preached in its purity, and been instructed in its precious truths ? Then,

2. As to yourselves :—“ Dare we to say, the investigation of divine truths has never been of any profit to us ? Hath not the Lord blessed the word to our souls ; and have we not been awakened by its faithful preaching, and by meditating on its precious contents ?

3. “ Did it not produce in particular this effect, that our hearts and our affections went out in love to God and his truths ? Are any objects so precious to us as God, the Lord Jesus, and those who love God ; and is not this an evidence of God’s love to us ? for it is impossible for us to love God without his having first placed his affections upon us.

4. “ Hath not God repeatedly, in this or the other occasion, given us tokens of his favour ? Hath he not animated us, and spoken, at times, comfortably to our souls, and caused us to see, that he would be our God ? Must we not confess, that we have freely and cordially given ourselves to him ? Are we not now willing to choose him for our portion ; and have we not a sincere desire to live tenderly and in holiness *before him all the days of our lives ?*”

Now, whenever you thus ascend from the less to the greater, would you not, by this mean, be likely to attain to a greater assurance of your state ? and, in such case, your distress would not prevent your engaging in holy meditation.

Or do others say, “ We are not in such doubts with respect to our state : but when we look to our

“ frames, as they are at present, we find them to be
 “ such, that we are rather inclined to avoid all re-
 “ flection, as to our real situation, than to meditate
 “ with care what our real condition is. We are so
 “ sinful, so dead, so spiritless, that when we retire in
 “ secret, we cannot keep our hearts in exercise; we
 “ depart continually further and further from the
 “ Lord,—that we know not what to do.”

We believe, and know, that many of God's children have reason to complain of their lukewarmness, and want of ardour: but shall this important work be neglected on this account? No. To meditate on ourselves, is, perhaps; the best mean to produce a change for the better. It may excite the soul to shame; and make it humbly confess before the Lord its defection and sins; and then, would not the believer be more likely to acquire a proper frame of heart, with which to approach the table of the Lord?

But, let us pass over to the THIRD thing which belongs to a due preparation for the Lord's Supper, viz. a solemn renewing of the covenant with God, and a surrendering of ourselves to Jehovah, to be his for ever.

But, when we say this must be done, in order to be prepared for the Lord's Supper, we remark, that we would not insinuate that we must, on such occasions, only renew our covenant: by no means. We esteem those the most happy, the most pious and tender among the people of God, who often, yes, who even daily, resolve that they will be the Lord's, and solemnly engage to come out boldly in his service. This renewing of covenant tends to make the believer circumspect in his walk; and therefore, whenever God excites the heart to it, such opportunities must be improved. But when we say, it must be

done in particular before commemorating the dying love of Christ, we would intimate, that on those occasions we must do it with PECULIAR solemnity, and in a more particular manner, because there God is beheld as offering himself to be our covenant God, and as presenting to us the seals of the covenant.

In what this renewing of the covenant consists, and how the soul is exercised in this solemn work, we have shewn at considerable length in the ninth Lecture: therefore we shall here omit repeating what was then observed.

But, is it asked by any, “ If we set a day apart
“ for renewing our covenant with God, at what pe-
“ riod of such day must we be engaged in this busi-
“ nefs? Must we commence or end the day with it?”
We shall not determine this point, as it is a matter of perfect indifference. Engage in it whenever the Lord awakens or excites you to it, though it should be at the beginning of such day. Whenever you find your souls to be thus awakened, THEN commence the solemn work. When the Spirit breathes in the heart, that time must be improved, if we would be successful in the attempt.

But methinks we hear you say, “ If God, alas!
“ should not awaken our souls in this manner, and
“ we continue dull, stupid, and lifeless, must we then
“ omit it, and wait until he cause our souls to be
“ thus exercised?”

We answer: It is certain that we are more sincere and animated in this work, and engage in it with greater joy and with brighter prospects, when God thus meets with the soul: but, though this should not be the case, still on no account whatever ought we to omit engaging of anew to be the Lord's, when about to commemorate his dying love at his table.

Do you reply, "That in such case it is only done with the understanding"? This may indeed be so; but still it may be agreeable to God: for the understanding in the children of God, who have actually entered into covenant, is not like that of natural men; for through the Spirit they have obtained light in their minds, and that indwelling spirit who leads them into all truth, daily teaches them internally: and although, at particular times, they may have no NEW light, still they have that light which he hath enkindled in their souls: and whenever their God hides himself, they must make use of the light which they have already communicated to them. Do you then find, to your sorrow, that your hearts are not animated and enlarged? come then, and look to the Lord. Lay your dull, dead, impotent hearts at his feet, and say; "Lord, we offer ourselves unto thee, just as we are; and because thou hast declared in the covenant, that thou wilt be the God of the miserable, and hast promised that thou wilt pardon their defects,—therefore we yield our cordial consent to that covenant, and accept of it with our whole souls: we will for ever be thine." And although you may before this have done it, without experiencing so much life and activity, you would then manifest, in a greater degree, the strength of your faith, which the Eternal always is pleased to see exercised; for in this way he discovers what is the great bent of your souls, viz. that they are determined to adhere to him.

The FOURTH point to be investigated, was, WHETHER IT BE EXPEDIENT TO KEEP A DIARY OR REGISTER OF OUR EXPERIENCES FROM ONE COMMUNION SABBATH TO ANOTHER, both as it respects the manner in which God hath met with the

soul, and the peculiar way in which it was exercised, particularly at the time of preparation.

On this question we previously remark, that we would not raise difficulties in the way of any individual; for there are, no doubt, many who are not qualified for an undertaking of this kind, and who, were they to set about it, perhaps might be otherwise employed to more advantage. When this is the case, it is best to omit it. But, on the other hand, if the people of God have TIME, opportunity, and are in some degree qualified, in such case, we conceive, that to keep a register of their experiences would be attended with much profit: at least, many experienced Christians have found it so. To register our sins, our graces, and the particular circumstances which have befallen us, is calculated to produce the best effects. When we afterwards peruse with attention the diary of our lives, now, it may be an excellent mean to cover our faces with shame, now to comfort us in the midst of scenes the most distressing and difficult, and now to awaken and arouse us into life, when we feel our frames to languish, and all spiritual animation is apparently gone.

But, in particular, to keep a register of this kind is very useful when engaged in preparing for the Lord's Supper. But here it must be observed,

1. That it would not be beneficial, at this time, to note down every thing which occurs; for this would take up too much of our time, and render us unfit for discharging other duties.

2. In particular, we should be careful to register what was the state of our souls upon the day of preparation; whether the heart was lively and animated; whether God embraced the soul in love; or whether we were then *in darkness, and saw no light*.

3. We would advise those who keep a register of this kind, to be careful to note the principal SINS which beset them, and the great DUTIES which the religion of Christ enjoins upon her votaries.

Is it now asked by any, what advantage attends the keeping of such diaries?

1. It would serve to exhibit to us the bent of our hearts; that we are not inclined hastily to run over these matters; but that we are deliberately exercised with respect to them.

2. Whenever we review the sins with which we have formerly had to wrestle, and which are still the same, and discover how small progress we have made in mortifying them, especially the sins occasioned by our particular tempers;—this, on the one hand, will serve to fill us with a holy shame before our God; and on the other hand, such a register may serve to encourage us, when we discover, by means of it, that we have declared ourselves to be enemies to all sin, and can appeal to the Lord himself, that from the time we gave ourselves over to him, it was our desire to strive against *every appearance of evil*, and that this is still the case.

3. Whenever we look upon the list of our duties, and see that we have, in any respect, been found faithful to God and to his cause, by coming out boldly for the honour of his name,—or that, in the strength of the Lord, we have done any thing to promote his glory,—this review will serve to excite us to gratitude, and fill our souls with admiration that God would condescend to make use of such unworthy creatures in his service. And if, in case we shall be afterwards called to discharge similar or more arduous duties, the recollection of this experience of

God's assistance would tend to afford us encouragement.

4. Further, the keeping of a register of this kind will serve to teach us, that we constantly stand in need of Jesus, as our *all and in all*. When reviewing it, we behold the number of our sins, we will, doubtless, be led to lay them at the feet of Jesus, and say; "Behold, Lord! here is the black catalogue of our sins! We seek the pardon of them in thy blood, and earnestly solicit the power of thy Spirit to mortify them. And behold too, here is the list of our duties: they have, indeed, been imperfectly performed, and greatly defiled by sins, but thy perfect righteousness *cleanseth from all sin*."

5. When our hearts are dead and inactive, and we look to our former frames, when our souls were lively and animated, this may serve to rekindle in our cold hearts the flame of sacred love, and make us more engaged and zealous for God, and the glory of his name.

But perhaps some may say, "Whenever we take a retrospective view of former experiences, and consider our present case, we find that it is not amended: we do not discern that we have advanced in the divine life: and the consideration of this produces much distress and anxiety respecting the truth of grace in the heart. Now, what is the cause of this want of improvement? Does Jesus want strength, or does the fault lie at our own doors? Do we seek him aright? What judgment must we form of ourselves?"

1. Your anxiety on this head will work no evil, as it brings you to examine and scrutinize your state and condition.

2. It may have the blessed tendency of exciting

your ardour, and of awakening you into redoubled zeal, to advance with more rapid steps in the way of life.

3. It may tend to excite ardent desires to approach the holy Supper of the Lord, both as a seal of the covenant, which affords medicine to sin-sick souls, and the richest dainties to those who *hunger and thirst after righteousness*; and as an excellent mean to promote growth in grace.

We must now, in the FIFTH place, enquire, whether, when engaged in preparing for this ordinance, we ought not to seek to be ADORNED in such a manner as will render us acceptable to the Master of the feast, when he comes to view the guests, and also, IN WHAT this adorning consists.

It is certainly proper, when we are about to appear at this marriage Supper, that,

1. We have on a wedding GARMENT; so that, when the King enters, we may be welcome guests at his table. And, next to the precious robe of the Mediator's righteousness, the best ornament with which we can appear, is, an

HUMBLE, MEEK, BROKEN, and contrite heart. This is a robe which suits every one, whether he be far advanced in the divine life, or whether his progress in it be small. This humble, meek, and contrite frame does not consist in our having a view of our own unworthiness and sinfulness, or in having a discovery of the grace of God in Christ, and in not daring to apply it to ourselves. Whatever keeps the soul back from embracing that grace, and makes us stand as it were afar off, may be termed unbelief: for the more sinful and miserable we find ourselves, the more fit objects are we of free grace.—

But we mean by the expression, such an humble

frame by which the soul, seeing the precious treasures of grace which God in Christ, in a covenant way, will give to such wretched sinners, sinks into deep humiliation, is lost in wonder and adoration, and with Jacob, exclaims,

Gen. xxxii. 10, *Lord, I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant :*

And with David, when God made such precious promises to him and his house,—

Who am I, O Lord God! and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto? and what can David say more unto thee? for thou, Lord God, knowest thy servant, 2 Sam. vii. 18, 21. He was so overwhelmed at the view of God's goodness, that he could scarcely find words to express the sense he entertained of his unworthiness. That man is possessed of the most grace, who is most humbled on account of what he hath received from the Lord. To be in a meek and lowly frame of heart, glorifies God in the highest, and therefore cannot but be most pleasing to him: for, *Thus saith the high and lofty One, who inhabiteth eternity, whose name is holy, I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit,* Isai. lvii. 15. He is also said expressly, 1 Pet. v. 5, *to give grace to the humble.* In such a frame of soul it is absolutely necessary to approach the table of the Lord: for then, and then only, when the soul is truly humble, can it be expected, that the Lord will reveal himself unto it in his love and grace.

2. We must not only be adorned with an humble frame of heart when we prepare to meet the Lord in this ordinance; but, that we may be acceptable guests, we must have our *faith* fixed on the fulness,

extent, and perfection of the covenant of grace, which God offers to us in his Son, and which is represented in the Lord's Supper, where the great Redeemer stands, and cries to all who are made willing, *Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled*, Prov. ix. 5. Behold, the fountain of my all-sufficiency is opened for you: *Let him that is athirst come, and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely*, Rev. xxii. 17. *Look unto me; in me there is righteousness and strength for you*, Isai. xlv. 22, 24. I have every thing which can satisfy your wants, Prov. viii. 18, 21, *Riches and honour are with me, yea, durable riches, and righteousness, that I may cause those that love me to inherit substance, and I will fill their treasures*.

3. Hath the believer seen this fulness offered to him? let him then also endeavour to have his HUNGER and THIRST after Christ and his fulness, excited: for, if this spiritual food is taken with satisfaction, then there must be an holy appetite for it. We must here act just as a person who is invited to some grand entertainment, where the most delicious food will be set before him. Such a person will not first go and feed upon common fare, and come full to the table to which he is invited; but, on the contrary, he will take care to come with a keen appetite. Thus too the mouth of faith must *be opened wide, that the Lord may fill it*, Ps. lxxxi. 11. *He filleth the hungry with good things*, Luke i. 53.

4. Besides this hunger and thirst, the believer's CONFIDENCE must be excited, that he may approach without fear, and not be hindered by unbelief, or alarmed by a view of the greatness and holiness of God: for the Lord Jesus not only says, *I love you*; but, *the Father himself loveth you*, John xvi. 27. A

moment's reflection upon this declaration cannot but urge us to approach, and to say, " Lord, though
" thou art high and holy, yet, because thou art the
" God of love, and makest so free an offer of thyself,
" we come to thee indeed with humility, but at the
" same time with boldness and filial confidence, to
" receive at thy hands the proffered blessings of
" grace." This is to come with *boldness to the throne of grace*, to which Paul exhorts the Hebrews, chap. iv. 16.

5. As a person who is about to meet with his best friend, makes every preparation to receive him well, and brings with him what he knows will be most acceptable to him; so must the believer, who at the table wishes to receive Jesus, also endeavour to be in that frame which will be most agreeable to him. But what is that frame? It is a cordial desire, a longing, an inclination of heart towards the Lord Jesus. Then is the soul properly exercised, when it can say, " O that my faith may be in such lively exercise, that I may come unto Jesus with as much joy as I can approach unto his table; that I may with the eye of faith look upon Jesus with as much steadfastness as with the eye of my body I can behold the signs; that I may with the feet of faith run towards him, that I may with the hand of faith take him, and become so united to him, as the bread and wine, when taken, become united to the body. Such a frame of heart is agreeable to Jesus:—he then sees that the soul is truly delighted with him.

6. Especially we must have our LOVE to God, to the Lord Jesus, and to all the saints, excited in us; for, in the Sacrament, all is love, that is exhibited to our view. There GOD THE FATHER reveals himself as the God of love, who, from pure and un-

merited love from eternity, hath determined to send, and in time hath actually sent his Son into the world, and offers him to every wounded and afflicted soul. There too we behold JESUS manifesting himself as one who hath accomplished the work of love to sinners, in procuring for them the salvation of their souls. There he exposes to view his crucified body, his shed blood, his wounds, which he received for the salvation of sinners. There we behold the SPIRIT of Love, whose office it is to create the soul anew in Christ, *shedding abroad the love of God in their hearts*. Such love must surely excite in the soul a return of love to God, and make us say with the Psalmist, *We will love thee, O Lord our strength*, Psalm xviii. 2.

Yes, we must exercise fellowship and love, with the saints already around the throne, and with all the believing members of Christ who are still on earth, as forming together one body, and as those who are bound to each other by the strongest ties.

7. Lastly, It is pleasing to God, to see the soul, having its love thus excited, zealously engaged in seeking after holiness, and approaching the table with a sincere and determined resolution to cleave to the Lord, to mortify sin, which causes so great a separation between God and the soul, and henceforth to become more steadfast in the work of the Lord.

See thus presented to your view, as briefly as was possible, the several points which we thought to be necessary to a right preparation for the table of the Lord.

We must now proceed to the last point assigned for discussion, which was, to remove some of the dif-

faculties which may be raised against what we have said in the course of this lecture.

These are of two sorts: either those which are made by NATURAL men, or those which are raised by TRUE BELIEVERS.

FIRST.—NATURAL MEN will raise many objections against what we have advanced on the subject which has been under consideration.

1. Some will say, “Can it be possible that believers now are called to perform so many severe and painful duties, seeing they live under the New Testament dispensation, have put off the yoke of bondage, and are *called to liberty*? This appears to be opposed to the very nature of the new covenant, which requires that we serve God in the Spirit.” To this objection we reply,

a. They who thus speak, evidence that they are no true Christians, and that they still are unacquainted experimentally with what it is to serve God in the Spirit.

b. And although it be true that God hath delivered his people from the yoke of bondage which had place under the Old Testament, believers are not therefore free from obligation. O no! They have taken upon them willingly the delightful yoke of Christ, who said, *My yoke is easy, and my burden is light*, Matt. xi. 28. And so far from considering that yoke to be a burden, they on the contrary declare, that it is all their desire, joy, and comfort. They know that *his commandments are not grievous*, 1 John v. 3.

2. Others say, “Yes, duties must be performed, and God will reward us on account of them: *for he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him*.” Persons of this cast rest upon works which they have

done; and this root of bitterness is deeply implanted in the heart of every natural man.

But here we must observe, that it is true we do not assert, that good works are not to be performed, as some falsely insinuate; but, on the contrary, we esteem it to be profitable, yes, absolutely necessary, to perform them: but there is a great difference between doing them in our own strength, and in the strength of the Lord;—between doing them as meritorious, and performing them from the principle of love. God does indeed reward his children ACCORDING to their works, but not FOR their works. The reward is not of merit, but of grace.

3. Others again go to the other extreme, and renounce WORKS altogether: saying, “Because Christ hath done all that was to be done, and the Spirit must apply his merits to our souls, therefore we have nothing more to do: we must sit still, and let God alone work. Besides, man is altogether impotent: and Paul himself teaches us, 2 Cor. iii. 5, *that we are not sufficient to think any thing as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God.*”

It is true—Neither do we deny that man is an impotent creature; nor do we refuse our assent to the proposition, “that God must work all our works in us.” But it is also true, that he obligates us to use the means. We cannot of ourselves do any thing to advance our eternal salvation. And yet Paul says, Phil. ii. 13, *Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling*, to teach us that we are bound to give all diligence, and use our utmost endeavours. Were this not the case, the doctrines of the gospel might well be charged with leading to carelessness and licentiousness.

But, SECONDLY, God’s children may also raise

many objections as to what has been spoken, which we must endeavour, in a few words, to obviate.

Perhaps many may say, "Is there so much required for a suitable preparation? We know not that we have ever been prepared in a right manner; and therefore have reason to apprehend that we have never attended the Lord's Supper with any advantage."

To this we reply in general, what has been already remarked, that we would not bind men to the observance of all these duties as absolutely necessary, nor do we assert that those have never communed acceptably to God, who have not precisely followed our directions—By no means. Hath God awakened you, and in some other way been preparing your hearts? praise him for it; and let not distressing fear afflict you.

Or, perhaps your circumstances have been, or are at present, such as to prevent you from complying with all the directions which have been given. You are destitute either of a sufficient knowledge of divine truths, or, having not yet been long on the way of life, you have as yet but little experience. If this be so, then the Lord requires it not of you. A father will not be displeased with his child that is just beginning to learn, because he cannot do as much as one that is more advanced; but is satisfied with him if he only find a sincere inclination to comply with his requisitions. Thus, the Lord does not require of you as much as of those who have made farther progress in the divine life. *But if there be a willing mind he accepteth us, not according to what we have not, but according to what we have.*

Or, it may be that you are involved in much CARE and BUSINESS, so that you cannot spare so

much time for preparation without interfering with your necessary temporal concerns. To attend to these is doubtless your duty: but if in the midst of them your hearts go out to God, you may be acceptable in his sight.

Others will probably say, "We have indeed taken time for preparation; we have repeatedly retired in secret; we commenced the work; but found ourselves so unqualified to progress in it, that we proceeded no farther."

But, we ask you, is not conduct like this extremely unreasonable? Shall a disciple who is just beginning to learn, because he cannot immediately perform the task his master has assigned him, quit it altogether, and say, "I will desist, and make no further trial?" or will he not rather try again and again, until he acquire the habit of learning? And is it reasonable for you, because every thing does not succeed to your wishes, immediately to cease attempting to prepare to meet your God? No: but rather persevere in that work; and, assisted by divine grace, you will find yourselves more and more qualified to proceed in it, to your unspeakable advantage.

Others will perhaps say, "We have often engaged in preparation for the holy Supper, and we appeared to be making progress: we read, we prayed, we meditated; but it was more the work of the head than of the heart; for we were so inactive and dull, as if there were no life in us. And therefore we think it best for the future to omit it altogether."

But, how unwisely would you act! This may be the case with your praying too. How often does it happen, that you cannot pray with that life and fervour which you would desire: Will you therefore leave off praying? Is it not better to pray with less

life and ardour than not to pray at all? Act the same part in regard to preparing for the Lord's Supper. Let it be to you a cause of sorrow, that you are so spiritless when engaged in it. But suffer not yourselves to be baffled. Go with that cold and lifeless heart to God, and say; "Lord, thou art our witness, what our inclinations were: thou knowest that our wishes were, to have been more sincere in the work; but thou hast not been pleased to send the sweet influences of thy Spirit into our souls. We leave the work with thee. Pardon what thine holy eyes have seen amiss whilst we have been engaged in performing it." Perhaps the Lord may meet you at his table, either now or at some future time; and even though this should not be the case, let it be your constant study to continue faithful in duty.

Do you still object and say, "If we engage in preparation, and are so faint and lifeless that we can find no satisfaction in it, but instead of affording comfort, it occasions distress;—seeing the Lord looketh on the heart, and if that be not right, nothing that we do can be acceptable to him."

It is true, the *heart* is principally to be attended to in duty; and the work of preparation is both agreeable and easy, if we cordially engage in it: but if, on the other hand, this be not the case, let it not tend to distress and alarm you, who thus complain; for your very complaint is an evidence that you cannot rest in any external duties, and that you are not satisfied unless your hearts be wholly engaged in them. Yes, from your complaint it appears, that the chief desire of your souls was, and now is, to have fellowship with God. Continue then in the use of means, depending on the Lord for his blessing. It often happens, that we begin with a dull and sluggish

frame, but as we proceed we become more lively and animated. And though it may be otherwise, let not your confidence be shaken; much less absent yourselves from the table of the Lord. Follow the example of the woman of Canaan, who, though Jesus once and again seemed to reject her suit, still persevered in her request until she obtained this testimony from him, *O woman, great is thy faith!* Thus must you also persevere in faith—This will be well pleasing to the Lord. Do you find, that at best you exercise it, like your other duties, very imperfectly? enter this important circumstance in the diary of your experiences. It will probably tend to keep you from pride, when to your other deficiencies you behold this annexed. Go therefore to the ordinance: present yourselves to God, and to the Lord Jesus, just as you are: at your peril, stay not away. *Behold, the Lamb of God*, who was SLAIN for your sins, stands already at his table, and reaches out to you the sceptre of his grace and favour—Touch it with a holy boldness. Who can tell but he may now make peculiar manifestations of his love and faithfulness to your souls.

May the Eternal himself by his Spirit teach you and qualify you for every good work, and make you to taste that he is good; and whilst you are seeking to be prepared to hold communion with him here in grace, may he prepare you for the marriage supper of the Lamb in glory: THERE you will never complain of languor or of dulness: but will always rejoice in him, in the most lively experience of his divine love.

A M E N.





T H E
P I O U S C O M M U N I C A N T .

Lecture XIII.

ON THE CONDUCT NECESSARY TO BE OBSERVED BY THE PEOPLE OF GOD, ON A COMMUNION SABBATH.



HAVING, in the preceding lecture, exhibited the manner in which a Christian ought to be prepared for an approach to the table of the Lord, we now proceed to consider the CONDUCT proper to be observed by the believer on the day on which the holy Supper of the Lord is administered. And in doing this, we shall,

1. Make some previous admonitory remarks; and,
2. Then consider the subject itself; or, in other words, point out what that conduct is which is proper to be observed on a communion sabbath by those who are about to approach the table of the Lord.

FIRST. We remark,

1. That the children of God ought to be on their guard lest they come forward in a CARELESS and INCONSIDERATE manner, without a becoming reverence of mind, or a due sense of the solemnity of the ordinance. When we have to do with the God of heaven and earth, we must watch the heart with

peculiar attention, see that it be not led astray by the various objects which present themselves, and be careful not to approach merely from custom. The words of Solomon are applicable to this point, Ecclesiastes v. 1, *Keep thy foot when thou goest into the house of God.* In drawing near to the table, we must seek to be divested of earthly-mindedness, and be on our guard lest, by the wandering of our thoughts, we lose those dispositions of mind with which we ought to appear before God, when we take our seats at the Redeemer's table.

2. As it is improper to approach the table in a careless manner, so we must guard against UNDUE AND DISTRACTING FEAR. Many reflect too much upon the GREATNESS of the work, look upon God in his majesty and holiness alone, and consider nothing in themselves but their own unworthiness and unfitness. "O!" say they, "can such sinful worms of the dust presume to hold communion with God? Certainly not." Hence it is, that so many look to a communion sabbath with a kind of secret dread, as if they were then to appear before God as their Judge: and hence it is, that their confidence is shaken. But thus to consider a communion sabbath, is erroneous in the extreme. The unconverted and inconsiderate sinner may indeed fear and tremble, while he approaches without a due impression of the solemnity of the ordinance; for God *will not be mocked*. Let him reflect upon the case of Nadab and Abihu. Those who thus come to the table, *eat and drink judgment to themselves*.

But thou, BELIEVER, hast no reason to fear on this account. We would not, however, that thou shouldst approach without a becoming awe, arising from a view of the greatness of God. But this

should not impede thy confidence and thy joy. Hast thou, when engaged in preparing for the Lord's Supper, examined thy heart? Must thou not acknowledge, that thou hast obtained, in some measure, that temper which the Lord requires, and that thy heart is inclined to seek him in truth? In such case, thou must view this sacrament as a joyful feast, at which the full bounties of grace are offered to thee,—at which a triune God appears descending from heaven,—the FATHER manifesting himself in his everlasting love, in the mission of his Son,—the SON exhibiting himself as the surety and mediator, who hath given himself to the death of the cross for thee, and as the merciful High-Priest, who will meet thee in love, and who tenders himself in all his offices to thee, saying, *Look unto me: open thy mouth wide, I will fill it*,—and the HOLY GHOST presenting himself ready to take thy hand and put it into the hand of Christ, and thus to unite thee to him in the closest bonds of friendship and affection, who will apply the benefit of his death to thee, and seal internally to thy soul all that which the external signs represent. When thou thus contemplatest the ordinance of the Supper, unbecoming fears ought to cease, and strong and ardent desires of approaching to thy Saviour God succeed.

3. Again, on a communion sabbath, be advised to engage in the solemn business of that day in an ORDERLY manner. It often happens, that the people of God are at a loss what first to do on that day;—whether to read, to pray, to sing, or to be engaged in holy meditations in secret. And while they engage in either, Satan their subtil enemy seeks to draw off the heart, and incline the mind to engage in some different work. Let them not, however, be influ-

enced by his suggestions, but persevere in doing that first to which God has most inclined their hearts, and follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Does he dispose them to commence the exercises of the day with thanksgiving or prayer, with singing or holy meditation? it is well, if it but serve to bring the soul into a suitable frame.

4. We must guard against being employed in so MANY things, as (if we may be allowed the expression) not to afford an opportunity for the divine agency. The people of God sometimes experience something like a desire of producing in themselves that frame of mind which God requires. It is true, we must use all diligence in order to meet God in a right manner; but it must not be in our own strength, as has before been shewn. We must, having used all the means, keep ourselves near to the Lord, and watch what frame it will please him to produce in us. He knows best what is most pleasing to himself, and what suits us best, and is most necessary for us. And besides, whilst we are looking at our own frames, we often see that the chief object of the sacrament is lost, viz. to shew forth the death of Christ, and to do it in remembrance of him. If this engrossed a sufficient degree of our attention, our cold hearts would be inflamed with love divine,—a frame of spirit ever pleasing to our blessed Lord.

5. We must further remark, lastly, that God's people must not think that the fruit and blessing of the ordinance DEPEND so much upon their GOOD FRAMES, as upon the influences of the Holy Spirit. When we may conceive ourselves to be least prepared, and quietly wait upon the Lord, then it is often found that the greatest blessing is experienced. But when, on the contrary, we think ourselves well

prepared to approach, and rest upon this, then we may frequently find the heart dull and lifeless, and the Lord at a distance. Thus Jehovah shews, that he is a sovereign God, and that every blessing depends on him. Means are ours, but success is from the Lord.

Having made these previous remarks, we now go on to the main point of which we were to treat, viz. To shew particularly the CONDUCT suitable to be observed by the people of God, on a COMMUNION sabbath.

We would not have any one to think, that if he fail in the observance of any of the directions now to be given, that therefore he does not go aright to the table. What we shall here offer is only by way of advice; and if it please the Lord to lead you in some other way, that must be pursued.

To shew then, how believers should conduct themselves, from the commencement to the close of a sacramental sabbath, we will observe the following order; shewing,

1. What is to be done in the MORNING, before we leave our houses;
2. What we ought to do, when leaving our houses to enter into the house of God;
3. How we ought to deport ourselves in the time of divine service;
4. How we ought to be exercised whilst the form of the administration of the Lord's Supper is read;
5. How we should be employed in drawing near to the table;
6. And lastly, what we have to do, after arising from the table, in returning to our houses, and throughout the remainder of the day.

Under these six particulars, every thing necessary

to be observed on this solemn occasion may be comprehended.

Let us then consider, FIRST, what the communicant is to do on the communion morning, before he leaves his house.

First, we observe, that he should arise from his bed not too early nor too late. Not TOO EARLY, lest through the day he be unfit, by reason of drowsiness, for the discharge of the solemn duties required. As long as we are upon earth we have bodies which are sluggish; and because our souls are so intimately united to them, they are apt to be affected by their languor and inactivity; and therefore the body requires necessary repose. Nor must he rise TOO LATE, as if there were no danger of his being straitened for time to make the necessary preparations for this solemnity.

Having risen in due time, he must seek to keep his thoughts from wandering; and to this end he will naturally reflect, “*This is the day the Lord hath made; in it I will rejoice. This is the day on which I may hold the nearest communion on earth with the God of heaven, and solemnly renew my covenant with him.*”

When he beholds the sun of nature rising to enlighten the face of the earth, his heart should breathe forth its ardent desires that the SUN of Righteousness might arise to his soul, *with healing in his wings.*

While he puts on his raiment, he may reflect on the *garment of salvation* and the *robe of righteousness*, the true wedding garment which makes the soul acceptable in the sight of God.

While he washes his body, let him by faith flee to the blood of Jesus, which *cleanseth from all sin.*

It will then be proper for him to engage in the SECRET duties of religion; such as reading a portion

of the word of God, and meditation, either on those points in general which, in his preparation for the ordinance, have been the subject of his reflection, viz. God in his glory, Christ in his fulness, and the covenant of grace with its blessing;—or, more particularly, on the suffering and death of the Lord Jesus, and the great privilege which he expects to enjoy, of holding fellowship with God, with the spirits of *just men made perfect*, already around the throne, and with all the saints composing the church militant on earth, and of having a prelibation of the blessedness which shall be enjoyed by the people of God in glory, who participate of the marriage supper of the Lamb.

Such meditations are necessary, because it may happen that the soul, which may have been much enlivened in its preparatory exercises, may now find itself under much deadness, and ready to complain, “My activity is sadly abated; my ardour is gone.” Now nothing will tend more to restore that frame of mind which is so much to be desired, than a recollection of those truths which God had before made instrumental of producing those lively impressions, the want of which are now lamented.

The pious communicant ought next to engage in devout THANKSGIVING and fervent PRAYER.

1. In devout THANKSGIVING for the opportunity which God is giving him, of *going up to his house with the multitude that keep holy day*, not only to be instructed in his ways, but even to sit with the King himself at his table: to be *abundantly satisfied with the fatness of his house*, and to *drink of the rivers of his pleasure*; that he may again, before God, angels, and men, profess to be *the Lord's*; that he will cleave to him, and, in virtue of the offering of his Son Jesus,

covenant with him; yea, that he may receive the pledges of the love of God from his hands, and hold intimate communion with him.

2. Fervent PRAYERS must be joined to thanksgiving. These must be according to the peculiar frame and situation in which the believer is. Especially the pious communicant must pray, that his soul may be animated; that he may meet with the Lord with a suitable preparation of heart; that his hunger and thirst, his faith and love, his hope, and every Christian grace, may be in lively exercise; that his heart may burn with love towards all his fellow Christians that shall sit down with him at the same table, and participate of the same bread and wine; and that the Lord would meet with him in love, reach out his sceptre of mercy, and speak *peace* unto him; that he would enable his ministering servants to address his people in such a manner as may best tend to awaken in them affections suitable to this solemnity; and that his Holy Spirit might shed abroad such divine influences, that every soul may be watered with grace, as the earth with the dew and rain of heaven.

Above all, the pious communicant, thus engaged in secret prayer, ought voluntarily and without reserve, to devote himself afresh to the Lord, resolving that he will be his, and only his for ever: for the best evidence to ourselves of our sincerity in publicly giving our hand to the Lord, is this, that we have done it previously in private, when there was no other witness besides God and our own souls.

BELoved! when God enables us thus to act in the morning of a communion sabbath, words cannot express how pleasing it is to him; nor can we tell what returns he may make to us by shedding

abroad his love in our hearts; and even though we should not receive any extraordinary communications of grace at the time, yet we may glorify God by earnestly seeking his face, and manifesting that we are anxious for his blessing, and that we esteem his favour to be life, and his loving-kindness to be better than life.

As this is the duty of every individual personally, so it will be proper for heads of families, and other suitably qualified persons, to employ the remaining time in the morning, in reading a portion of the word of God together, and in social prayer; and as a communion sabbath is a particular season for holding Christian fellowship, they ought to pray, not only for those who are present, but for absent Christian friends, especially for their ministers, that God would enable them to discharge the duties of the day, to his glory, and the edification of his people; that he would bless the congregation, satisfy his children *with the fatness of his house*, and cause them to drink abundantly of those streams which flow from the fountain *opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and uncleanness.*

These duties being performed, either alone or with the family, the communicant ought carefully to preserve a calm and composed frame of mind, guarding against any thing which may tend to divert the mind from God and the approaching solemnity. We have, my brethren, treacherous hearts, an implacable adversary, and it is not easy to tell how trifling an incident may lead us astray: we therefore, on such an occasion, have the strongest motives to urge us to vigilance.

Are pious communicants thus to conduct on the morning of a sacramental sabbath?—let us now, in

the SECOND place, consider what ought to be their conduct when they proceed from their own houses to the house of God.

1. Their RAIMENT should be PLAIN and decent, divested of splendour and gaiety. Too great an attention to the decoration of our persons, when we enter into the presence of the most high God, and when we are about to sit with the meek and lowly Jesus, at his table, is very unbecoming, incompatible with true humility, and offensive to Christian brethren. Hence, our apparel should be modest, and such as would indicate that we are what we profess to be, the humble followers of the Lamb. It is not required, however, that our dress be below our rank and condition. Every one should appear agreeably to the station in which God hath placed him. Do any move in the higher walks of life? let them adorn themselves richly, but with a becoming simplicity. Do they belong to the lower classes of society—yea, are they among the poor and needy—and are their bodies clothed with the meanest garments, provided they be clean and decent? let them not, on this account, keep back from the table. God looketh upon the heart. If that be enriched with grace, it is acceptable in his sight. If communicants be but *poor in spirit*, God will look with complacency upon them, whatever may be their exterior garb.

2. As pious communicants proceed from their homes to the place of public worship, let them be careful to maintain a COMPOSED, HUMBLE, and TRANQUIL frame; and to this end avoid, as much as possible, all conversation with those they meet, especially such as would lead the mind astray. Let them also be on their guard against permitting their

eyes to rove abroad. By idle conversation, and an attention to external objects, we are in great danger of having our hearts drawn off from things heavenly and divine. As we cannot, at the same time, contemplate different objects, it is certain, that if our attention be directed to things temporal, those which are spiritual will escape our view; and Satan, who is an artful foe, improves every opportunity to mislead us. He places himself in the midst of us, when we appear in the presence of the Lord, and it is a matter of perfect indifference to him by what means he diverts us from duty. It will therefore be expedient, in the present case, to keep ourselves collected within ourselves, without paying any further attention to others than what common courtesy requires.

3. Departing from their houses, pious communicants may very applicably call to mind the words of David, Ps. xlv. 10, *Hearken, O daughter, and incline thine ear: forget also thine own people and thy father's house: so shall the king greatly desire thy beauty*—And say, “As we leave our houses, so it is the desire of our hearts to leave our sins behind us: as Israel left Egypt, and Lot left Sodom without looking back, we would forsake all worldly cares, and employ ourselves in seeking those things which are above.”

But, THIRDLY, let us enquire how pious communicants should deport themselves during the performance of DIVINE service.

1. Let them repair in season to the house of God, that they may engage in his worship from its commencement. To the shame of many be it spoken, that the sinful custom obtains, as well on communion sabbaths as on ordinary occasions, of appearing at a late hour in the courts of the Lord; as if they con-

ceived, that what precedes the sermon constitutes no part of divine worship. We are aware that some, whose families are large, may be prevented; and in such it may be pardonable: but many also, from mere custom, and with design, enter not within the house of God until the minister has commenced speaking. Such conduct not only deprives the persons themselves of the preceding parts of the service, but tends to disturb others, and therefore is highly unbecoming, yea, sinful, and should be amended, especially on a communion sabbath.

2. Having entered into the house of God, and being seated, let pious communicants guard against every species of AFFECTATION; such as hanging down the head, distorting the countenance, audible sighs, and the like. This is offensive to others, and is not pleasing to God. We cannot here refrain from remarking, with the pious and celebrated *Brahel*, when speaking on this subject,—“Be ashamed,” says he, “of that affectation, which favours so much of hypocrisy, and is disagreeable both to the pious and ungodly.” No, beloved, the Lord regards the heart. Every kind of affectation proceeds often more from habit than from the affections of the heart.

But we would not be understood to speak against a grave and serious deportment; nor would we insinuate, that, under lively impressions of divine truth, it is unbecoming to discover any sensible emotions. On the contrary, when these are sincere and unaffected, they may have the happy tendency of exciting the affections of others. We only speak against that kind of affectation with which the world and even the pious themselves are offended.

3. Pious communicants must engage in all the PARTS of divine service; and not conceive, that if

any part does not agree with their particular frames, or is not adapted immediately to their cases, it is therefore USELESS to them. No: let them cordially engage in the whole of the service: every part of it may be profitable to them, and afford something peculiarly adapted to their very case. When they hear the word of God read, and particularly such parts of it as are usually read on a communion sabbath, this may be a mean of exciting their love to its divine Author. When they sing his praises, they may be enabled to make *melody in their hearts to the Lord*. When the minister begins to pray for a blessing,—when he pleads for divine assistance,—let them subjoin their entreaties that he may be aided in the discharge of his duty, and become to them *a faithful steward of the mysteries of God*. While he prays for the congregation, let them cordially unite in those supplications, and thus join in the communion of saints; and then, if the Lord may be pleased, in answer to these prayers, to quicken and animate his ministering servants, the souls of his people may be duly affected and edified. Let them beware of wandering thoughts, even though they may be good thoughts; attend to all the truths which are delivered; apply them to themselves, and especially, when the marks of grace are laid down, let them examine their hearts by them. By this they may be both encouraged and confirmed.

We now proceed to the FOURTH point, namely, the MANNER in which communicants are to deport themselves, that they may hear with advantage the FORM of the administration of the Lord's Supper read.*

We observe, in general, that their minds should

* See this form in the Appendix.

be attentive during that exercise. It is improper to be employed in reading portions from the word of God, or any other book, as the practice of many is; but they should seriously reflect on all the parts of that form, as it is laid in order before them, which may prove greatly to their edification. For, in that form of administration,

1. We have the truth established, that the sacrament of the Lord's Supper is a divine institution; that Christ hath instituted it in remembrance of him; that it is not only a duty incumbent on the people of God to wait upon him in that ordinance, but that, upon good grounds, they may expect to receive a blessing, seeing they approach on the warrant and command of Christ himself.

2. The form of administration further exhibits three things as requisites in every person who approaches the table of the Lord; and every one ought to ask himself,—Can I say amen to them all? Have I any KNOWLEDGE of the NUMBER and AGGRAVATED NATURE of MY SINS? Dare I say, that God has not shewed me to myself; nor given me a sight of my sins, and the curse due to me for them? Have I not confessed them with shame? Have I not, on account of them, often been as a *worm* before God, and been overwhelmed with a view of my unworthiness? Have I good ground to believe, THAT all my SINS are FORGIVEN ME FOR THE SAKE OF CHRIST? Do I not remember how lovely and precious Jesus was to my soul, when I saw myself a condemned creature before God? Yes; I cannot but declare, that I then left all and followed him; I made him my refuge and hiding-place; and by faith cast myself on the arms of his everlasting love; that by him I might become a partaker of his salvation.

I know too, what a desire and purpose of heart I have had, in the name and strength of the Lord, TO BE HOLY, to mortify sin, and thus to govern myself all the days of my life, that I might shew true thankfulness to God, and walk uprightly before him; and because I love God *who hath begotten, I also love those who are begotten* of him; and have therefore LAID ASIDE, UNFEIGNEDLY, ALL HATRED AND ENMITY AGAINST MY NEIGHBOUR, and, as much as possible, desire to walk in peace with all men.

3. Do we hear set forth in that excellent form of administration, the sins and offences which deprive persons of their right of approaching to the table? this may excite the soul to gratitude, and lead it to say, "Lord! by thy grace I have been preserved in a great measure from those gross sins; and when I may have offended in any of those points, upon a conviction of my offences, I confessed them before thee, fled to the blood of Christ for pardon, and through thy grace and Spirit, have had the power of them broken."

4. Does the form observe, that communicants do not come to the table TO DECLARE THAT THEY ARE WITHOUT SIN; but on the contrary, do they testify THAT THEY SEEK THE PARDON OF SIN OUT OF THEMSELVES IN JESUS CHRIST, and from his Spirit, strength to make opposition to it?—this may serve to encourage and comfort those who, feeling the power of corruption, would often stand afar off, and be afraid of approaching,—and cause them to say, "Lord! thou art my witness, that I come to this ordinance to experience the virtue of Jesus' blood, *which cleanseth from all sin*; to give my unclean heart to him, that he may *purify me from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit*. Thou knowest

how much sin is my grief and burden, and how strong my desires are, through thy grace, to war against it."

5. Does the form of administration represent the principal object of the Lord's Supper to be, TO REMEMBER CHRIST, and TO SHEW FORTH HIS DEATH?—here we are led seriously to contemplate all those bitter pains and sufferings of soul and body, which Jesus, on account of sin, and from the love he bore to sinners, hath endured, that they might be SAVED FROM THE WRATH OF GOD; yea, that he gave *himself over unto death*, TO DELIVER THEM FROM EVERLASTING DESTRUCTION. When the pious communicant contemplates all this with application to himself, it may be a happy mean of producing in the soul love both ardent and sincere to God and Christ, and of evidencing this by a dedication of itself to him.

6. Is it declared in the form, that in this ordinance pious communicants maintain the *communion of saints*, whilst THEY EAT OF THE SAME BREAD, AND DRINK OF THE SAME CUP? this may excite in their hearts a love to all believers, who have an interest in the same Jesus, even to those who are already before the throne, who, when on earth, had eaten together of the same bread, and sat down at the same table, but now have their seats at the marriage supper of the Lamb.

7. Is the form of administration concluded with a PRAYER and a CONFESSION of faith?—we must also solicit a blessing at the hand of God, and plead that, in partaking of the sacrament, he would be graciously present with us. We should also, with our whole hearts, say AMEN to those articles of FAITH of which we make profession in public; and thus evidence to ourselves, that we not only make confes-

sion with the mouth, but believe with the heart unto salvation.

Thus to use this excellent form, will render it of advantage in preparing the people of God for partaking of the Lord's Supper.

Now follows the FIFTH and principal point to be investigated, namely, HOW THE PEOPLE OF GOD ARE TO BE EMPLOYED IN DRAWING NEAR TO THE TABLE.

Here it must be premised, that all those who approach aright, (for we are now speaking to those only) must consider themselves as the members of one body, united with the same head. This must always be kept in mind, that we may deport ourselves as members worthy of such a head. In order to this, several things are to be attended to, some of which respect our EXTERNAL deportment, and others our INTERNAL exercises.

As to our EXTERNAL deportment,

1. We must be careful to avoid DISORDER in approaching to the table, and not consider it as essential whether we come first or last; for, whether we come first or last to the table, we eat of the same bread, and drink of the same wine, and thus may hold communion with all the saints of God, even with those who are not present.

2. Be not too much set upon having your SEAT near the minister, with a view to receive the bread and wine from his own hands; and in order to this, beware of CROWDING or passing by those who are before you. This is superstition. It is indeed the practice of some; but it is folly. Ministers can give only the external sign, but the efficacy is from God. If Jesus do but reach out to us the sceptre of his love, it will be a matter of perfect indifference whe-

ther we receive the bread and wine immediately from the minister, or whether it be distributed to us by others.

3. Avoid all complimentary SALUTATIONS, as being unfuitable on an occasion so solemn. There are opportunities sufficient afforded us to pay attention to our Christian friends; so that the omission of it on this solemn occasion cannot be considered as proceeding from a want of respect, but because the heart, at such a time, is taken up with things of infinitely higher moment.

4. Beware of suffering your EYES to wander to and fro to see who are present at the table, and how they conduct themselves. This would evidence that the heart was not duly affected with the solemnity; and the grand adversary may seize this opportunity to cause the eye to fall on objects which may lead the soul off from things spiritual; and thus, before we are aware, the heart may be engaged in the contemplation of things about which it ought not to be employed.

5. But, when you sit down at the table of the Lord, it will not be improper to let your eyes be fixed upon the bread and wine. Many indeed have the custom of closing their eyes, with this good intent, that their minds may not be diverted from the solemn transaction in which they are engaged: or it may proceed from internal affections: in such case we have nothing to object—yet we are called upon, in the Lord's Supper, not only to hear and to taste, but also to see *how good the Lord is*. As our hands must be opened to receive the signs, the mouth to eat and to drink; so let the eyes be opened to behold the bread and the wine, as the visible pledges of the love of Christ.

6. Those who view themselves as believers, united to Christ, and to each other, must pray for their brethren in their common Lord, that God would be pleased to make them experience his grace; that at the table they may be *abundantly satisfied with the fatness of his house, and be made to drink of the rivers of his pleasures*. When we are enabled thus heartily to engage in prayer, it is not easy to tell what may be the efficacy of these addresses.

These things we have thought proper to mention relative to our external deportment: and previous to our passing on to that which appertains to the internal exercises of communicants, we would remark, that perhaps it may be asked, “Which is the best method to be pursued by ministers in dispensing the ordinance?—whether to confine themselves to the ordinary words which are in use in distributing the bread and wine, or whether to make such observations as he conceives to be most applicable to animate and encourage the hearts of God’s people.”

We reply, that some of the communicants present may enjoy such frames, that they do not require an address to be made to them, or any thing to be spoken in order to assist their meditations. Such may in silence be exercising faith and love: God may meet them: the going out of their affections to him may be answered with further manifestations of his love to them. For persons of this description, it might perhaps be best not to interrupt their devotion by any discourse. But seeing such are by far the smallest number in these days, when we discern so little of spirit and life, and when so many, instead of approaching with confidence, stand afar off, full of distress, afraid to apply to themselves the salvation proposed to them for acceptance, and dare not to take

hold of the promises; it is useful, yea, necessary, that the servants of the Lord Jesus should endeavour to encourage them by observations which may tend to excite their confidence. They must address the weeping Marys who see not Jesus, though he be present with them at the table, saying, *Why weep ye? whom seek ye?* and shew them that the table is spread for the sorrowful and the sad, and that therefore they are at liberty to draw near.

Others are often dead and spiritless: they cannot raise their hearts above. These may, by some animating observations, which God may put in the mouths of his servants, be quickened, and obtain new life and strength: and even those who may be in some measure suitably, actually exercised, may be benefited: it may please the Lord to bless what may be spoken, in such a manner, that their souls may be still more quickened.

Let us now examine, what ought to be the INTERNAL exercises of each Christian in his APPROACH to the table of the Lord.

First, In drawing nigh to the table, he ought to represent to himself the Lord Jesus as addressing him in particular, and as saying, *All things are ready; come to the wedding. Come, eat, O friends, and drink abundantly, O beloved! Let thy soul delight itself in fatness. I have prepared my table in thy presence: Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled.* And on this invitation, let him go to the table; professing before the Lord, that it is his desire, that his heart may be as much exercised in respect to Jesus, as the body is engaged with the signs: that he may with the EYE of faith behold him as suspended on the cross; that with the HAND of faith he may receive him; and with the MOUTH of

faith, taste his goodness and his love. With such professions, let him take his seat at the table.

If it be asked, what ought to be the subject of his meditation when seated there? we answer, as has been before remarked, that because communicants are to be at the table but for a short time, let them not aim at doing too many things, but quietly wait upon the God of their salvation. Let them bring the empty vessel of their hearts to God's all-sufficiency to *receive grace for grace*. Who can tell but that he may speak peace to them, and embrace their souls in the arms of his love!

But, since there are no promises that God will, without means, meet with them, they must not be inactive. Nothing becomes them better, than that they be deeply impressed with a sense of their unworthiness, emptiness, and obnoxiousness to condemnation before God; and ready to say, "We are worms of the earth, sinful dust and ashes. May we sit down at the table of the Lord? May we eat of his bread, and drink of his wine? May we enjoy the privilege of entering within the palace of the King? Are the riches of his house, and the blessings of his kingdom distributed to us? Lord! we are *unworthy of the least of all thy mercies and of all thy truth*, conferred by thee upon us. Wilt thou deign to look on such creatures as we are? What shall we thy servants and handmaidens say unto thee? *Lord, Lord, we are unworthy that thou shouldst come under our roof*." Language cannot describe how sweet, how reviving to the soul, and how delightful in the eyes of God, such frames are. He will manifest his grace to such persons. But this sight of their unworthiness should not so affect them as to make them lose their confidence, continue in unbelief, keep at a distance from

God, and say, “ We are too unworthy and too sinful: our poverty is so great that we dare not approach.” No: because you are so poor, you have need of a fulness to supply your wants: because you are so unworthy, you must give all the glory to Jesus, for condescending to regard such creatures as you are: because you are so sinful, you must flee to his shed blood to be washed: because you deserve the curse, you must seek a hiding-place in his wounds—you cannot be too miserable to be healed, too poor to be enriched. Let all these considerations, then, excite you the more to apply to his fulness, from which all your wants can be supplied.

But when communicants have thus contemplated their situation by nature before God, let them, on the other hand, look at the table as opening to their view an abyss of love and grace;—God in his everlasting compassion,—the triune, blessed, and all-sufficient God, who stood in no need of the sinner, out of pure, free, and unmerited mercy, condescending to look upon them.

Think, communicants, that you hear God crying, as with a voice from heaven, *I have loved you with an everlasting love, and therefore with loving kindness have I drawn you*, rather than that you, my children, should die, and sink into the bottomless pit of destruction. I have parted with my Son, the Son of my love, who was my delight from eternity; I have appointed him to be a surety, sent him into the world in *the form of a servant*, and given him up to die the shameful, painful, and accursed death of the cross, to be the procuring cause of your eternal salvation. Here is a confirmation of my love towards you, that Christ for you hath died, when you were yet sinners. *I have so loved the world, that I have given mine only*

begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life. All this I offer to you; and, to remove your unbelief, behold the visible tokens by which I confirm the offer! Take these signs: say AMEN to my gracious proposition: in using them, embrace my Son; and then will you attain to life eternal, and derive satisfaction and comfort from me.

At the table, COMMUNICANTS may also see the LORD JESUS presented to their view as hanging on the cross, who out of pure love for sinners gave himself up unto death, and shed his precious blood to redeem them from destruction. Think, beloved, that you hear him saying to you, “My afflicted children, dejected and disconsolate as you are, ADVANCE. Why do you keep at such a distance from me? I, your master, call you. I have procured for you an everlasting salvation, which I will also apply to you. I stand ready to reach out to you the sceptre of my love. I will embrace you. I offer to you all my treasures. Come, look unto me: in me, the Lord, *are righteousness and strength.* Although your wants be many, and your case be miserable, I have a fulness which is sufficient to supply your wants, and deliver you from your wretchedness. My name is *the Lord that hath compassion on you.* I am the kind Samaritan who will bind up all your wounds. Only come to me: *I will in no wise cast you out.* Behold the pledges of my love, which I put into your hands: receive them, and cast yourselves upon me as your mediator and surety.”

Upon an invitation so rich in love, with freedom and confidence receive the signs and seals. Let not unbelief keep you back; but consider with yourselves,—“Has Jesus given himself unto the death for

sinners, and will he reject us? Whilst he dwelt on earth, what multitudes did he relieve that applied to him for succour! and will he cast us off, whom he so graciously invites? If he designed or delighted in our ruin, he would not have spread his table in our presence. We will therefore receive the offered salvation, and apply it to ourselves."

Yes, communicants, by faith you may also behold GOD the HOLY GHOST, the Author of all grace, standing ready to unite you to the Lord Jesus, to join your trembling hand to his, to engage you in renewed fidelity to him, and by these tokens of love divine to seal to your souls the love of God.

Oh beloved! tongue cannot express how such contemplations are often the happy means of drawing forth the affections of believers towards their God and their Redeemer. The language of their hearts will be, "Lord! dost thou make such manifestations of thy love to creatures so unworthy?—we would humbly attempt to make some grateful returns of love towards thee. Dost thou, as the God of the covenant, address thyself to us, saying, *I will be your God?*—we will subjoin our cordial Amen, and bind ourselves to thee for ever; and in witness of this, we take from thy hand the signs and the seals."

But many pious souls perhaps may say, "It is indeed comfortable to have the heart thus exercised: but alas! it is often far otherwise with us. Though we endeavour to keep those thoughts in view, our hearts feel little affected by them. It does not always please God to imbue us with his Spirit. We often attend upon this ordinance with much languor, and experience but little sweetness and comfort in it."

This may indeed be the case, and thus the Lord

shews that he is free and sovereign in the distribution of his grace. But such lifeless frames may often proceed from having our expectations raised too high; as if, by attending upon the Lord's Supper, you must always obtain some extraordinary manifestations of the love of God; or, like Paul, be *taken up into the third heaven*, and be admitted into the immediate presence of God. It is true, in some few instances, the Lord makes such discoveries: this, however, is not his ordinary way of dealing with his people; yet, when he is about to bring extraordinary trials upon them, or to lead them into dark and gloomy ways, or when he is about to remove them by death, he often gives them, in this ordinance, a pledge of his love: he comforts and animates their hearts by making them to eat of the *hidden manna*, and, by a prelibation, causes them to taste of that rich entertainment which is *prepared in heaven for them*. But as this is not ordinarily to be expected, nor promised in the word of God, we are not to set our hearts too much upon it, nor too ardently pant after it; but leave it with the Lord to act the sovereign's part. In this life we must *walk by faith, and not by sight*; and to this we are called also in the sacrament. It is faith which must then be exercised; and if communicants may only approach in faith, it is to draw nigh in a precious frame. It is beyond expression great, if we are enabled to lay hold of that which is believed. For,

1. Is it not a great thing, if, when impressed with your poverty and perishing condition, that you are enabled to come with humility before the most high God?

2. Is it not a great thing, that the Lord Jesus has been made precious to your souls?—that you can

say, *He is the fairest of the sons of men, and altogether lovely?*

3. Is it not great grace to have your hearts hungering and thirsting after him; prizing him above all, and renouncing all things for an interest in him?

4. Is it not a great thing to be enabled in faith to make use of the signs, and to declare, that as we receive the bread and wine presented to us, so we wish also to receive the Lord Jesus: as it unites with our bodies, so we desire to be most intimately united to him? And although you receive nothing more, is it not a source of comfort that you may enjoy thus much?

To this you will no doubt readily assent, and yet be ready to say, “All this is at best but a *flying for refuge to Jesus*, and we are doubtful whether we have ever come thus far: and if we approach the sacrament in this state of mind, we cannot expect to derive much profit from it.”

But let not this keep you back. That act by which we take refuge in Jesus, is really faith, and as pleasing in the sight of God as an assured faith. Only go with ardent desires; fly to Jesus, and say, “We would rather perish at thy feet, than keep at a distance from thee.” And thus may you attend upon the ordinance with advantage to your souls.

Let us now enquire, in the SIXTH and last place, how a believer, who hath been at the table, ought to be exercised during the REMAINDER OF DIVINE SERVICE, and in RETURNING from the house of God.

First, During the REMAINDER of divine service, it is proper,

1. When the minister, in dismissing the table, pronounces the blessing, cordially to concur, and to add, “Now, Lord, I am going from thy sacred board:

let thy blessing and thy peace rest upon me, and thy grace abide with me. I cannot, whilst I am in the wilderness of this world, always sit at thy table; but still my soul cleaves to thee. Let then thy *right hand uphold me.*"

2. We must pour out our souls to God, in GRATITUDE, and lie low in the dust before him. Contemplating the greatness of his love, in admitting creatures so unworthy to a seat at his table, that there we may enjoy fellowship with God, with the spirits of the just before his throne, and with all the saints on earth, it becomes us, deeply impressed with a sense of our miserable condition by nature, to say, "Lord! *what shall we render unto thee* for all thy benefits? What returns of gratitude shall we make to thee? We will love thee, O Lord, *our strength and our Redeemer.* From henceforth shall the *love of God in Christ constrain us to judge, that as one died for all, it becomes us all, being dead, to live, not to ourselves, but to him that died for us.* From this time forth, we will, in the strength of the Lord, make our *members instruments of righteousness to the glory of God.* We have sworn, and we will make it good, *that we will keep thy righteous statutes.*"

3. We must ask ourselves,—Whether the Lord hath refreshed our souls, and satisfied them with his loving kindness? and whether, at his table, we have tasted of the spiritual meat and drink with which he feeds his people? We must, in like manner, be determined to go through the wilderness of this world in the strength of this food; that thus it may be manifest, that of a truth the ordinance of the Supper administers nourishment to the souls of his people.

4. Hast thou been at the table? RETURN to thy

men of the world do for a marriage day. Nothing delights them more than the prospect of approaching the table, and holding there sweet converse with their God. But as you have not yet experimentally known how good it is to serve God, it is no wonder that you are strangers to the exercises of true Christians in respect to this ordinance; and the conclusion which you draw respecting yourselves, "that you are unfit for this ordinance," is, no doubt, just. You have attended on it hitherto only out of custom: you have not looked beyond the externals of the ordinance.

But you will say, "To insist upon the performance of so many duties, is to inculcate a righteousness by works, which is a principle diametrically opposed to the religion we profess; for that teaches, that man is altogether unable to do any good thing, and that it is God *who must work all our works in us and for us.*"

Yes, that is true; God must work all in us and for us, and we hold, agreeably to the word of God, the doctrine of man's insufficiency. But since he is a rational creature, God will have him to be in the use of means: for if, depending on God to do all for you, you neglect those means through which God communicates the blessing, it is in vain for you to expect it. He enjoins the use of means; and if you do sincerely persevere in the use of them, who knows what blessing he may be pleased to bestow upon you? And with this view it is, that we point to the means, and recommend the use of them in a humble dependance upon divine grace. Did you but consider the service of God to be of such importance as it really is, you would improve the means: the people of God do prize them, and often find, that whilst

they are using them, the refreshing gales of the divine Spirit cherishes their faith, their love, and every gracious affection.

DELUDED MEN ! who have so frequently gone to the Lord's table, and never yet in a right manner !—lay it to heart, and consider, that if so much be requisite in order to approach acceptably to God, and if *he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh judgment to himself*, what reason you have to ask yourselves, “ What is our standing, who are so lifeless and unconcerned ? who have never retired alone, and bowed the knee before God, or at best have only repeated a hasty form of prayer, but are strangers to the spirit of prayer ; who approach the sacrament without consideration, with hearts filled with sin and vanity ; who, being at the table, suffer our eyes to rove abroad, but never once meditate on God, or on that Jesus, whose death is shewn forth in the external signs.”

If you had such views of yourselves, you would soon see, that your approaches are only from custom or fashion,—that you have not on the wedding garment. How deplorable is your case ! Have you not to expect, that when the king comes in to see the guests, he will say to you, *Friends, how came ye in hither, not having on the wedding garment ? Bind them hand and foot, and cast them into outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

O that the Lord would, on this side of eternity, impress these thoughts upon your hearts, and convince you of your sinful conduct towards him, and cause you to confess it with shame and confusion of face. Seek redemption in the blood of Jesus, and beware of approaching again in so careless and unconcerned a manner. The time of admi-

nistering the ordinance again draws nigh—Retire alone, seriously contemplate your situation, and say; “ We have so often approached unworthily, O that we may be made more sensible of the solemnity of this ordinance! We will improve the means, and prepare to meet with God. Who can tell what the Lord may do for us?”

But I have a special word to you, PEOPLE of God, who are perplexed and distressed, particularly about *the time* when the ordinance is to be administered. You think that you have no right to approach with confidence. You are saying, “ Our sins are too great: the *salvation* exhibited is not for us. We are fearful that we shall eat and drink judgment to ourselves, and therefore we dare not go forward.”

To you we would say, You ought by no means to keep back from the ordinance. You are invited by Jesus. If you but come to him, he gives you this precious promise, *I will in no wise cast you out*; and that word, *in no wise*, removes every impediment out of the way. For, had the Lord Jesus described ever so many cases, and made only a single exception, you would possibly say, “ We are not of those who are invited:” but, blessed be God! the invitation is, *Whosoever cometh*, how many or how great soever his sins, or how long soever he may have persisted in them, *I will receive* him in mercy: I offer to him the blessings of the covenant, and I will seal them to his soul in the use of the sacrament.

Will ye say, “ If this be true, then a bold and presumptuous sinner may approach; for then no one is excluded?”

It is no unwarrantable boldness or presumption for a sinner to approach this ordinance, provided he

is willing to be saved by Christ, in that way which the gospel points out : but, because he would rather live in sin than be delivered from it, he practically declares, that he will not accept of Jesus on gospel terms. But this is not the case with thee, afflicted soul ! thou wilt not dare to make the assertion ; but, on the contrary, canst thou not call upon God to witness, and say, “ Thou, Lord, knowest what a burden my sins are to me,—how much inward pain they give me,—how I have to wrestle against them. Thou art also witness to the tears I shed in secret on account of them. How often, Lord, am I compelled to cry, *O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death ?* Thou knowest how willingly I would be freed from it,—how often I call on Jesus as my king, to destroy its power in me.” Well now, canst thou in sincerity do all this ? I must declare to thee, that thou hast no ground to be discouraged. Only look unto Jesus ;—fall down at his feet, and declare to him, that thou, though miserable in thyself, art willing to be saved by him. Thou art not a greater sinner than the prodigal son, who left his father’s house, and *spent his substance in riotous living* ; and who, when he came to himself, resolved and said, *I will arise and go to my father, and confess my sin before him*, and met with a gracious reception. The father had, indeed, reason to cast him off ; but yet he runs to meet him, and with paternal tenderness embraces him, receives him again, and admits him to a seat at his table. O afflicted child of God ! the Lord hath spoken this parable for thy encouragement, to manifest the greatness of his love,—to represent to thee, that he will not reject the greatest of sinners, and to declare that he calls thee, saying, “ Whoever thou art,—though thou mayest be ever

so sinful,—though thou mayest have trampled upon my image, abused my goodness, and plunged thyself into sensuality ;—if thou wilt but return unto me, as did the prodigal son, and confess your sins and unworthiness, I will embrace and receive you in mercy. My honour stands pledged to save the chief of sinners. For this I have shed my blood, given myself to the death, and, in token of this, I have instituted this sacrament, to which I now invite thee.”

Can the Lord Jesus do more to allure thee? Go then, with confidence, and take thy seat at his table.

Yes, but you will say, “ It is possible I may deceive myself, and not come aright: it is so great an undertaking.”—This objection must fall to the ground: thou canst not be deceived. If thou art satisfied that indeed it is the desire of thy heart to seek an interest in Christ,—if thy soul hateth sin, and thou wilt not indulge in any iniquity, but on the contrary art habitually to bid adieu to sin,—these exercises are so many evidences of thy sincerity. And canst thou profess before the Lord, that these are the real exercises of thy heart? we may assure thee, that thy sins are so far from being a reason of thy abstaining from this ordinance, that they should rather press thee to attend upon it; for there Jesus’ blood is set forth, as the great propitiatory sacrifice for sin.

But dost thou still object—“ *This is too much.* How can a wretch as I am, dare to apply to myself such unspeakable grace? How can so vile a creature venture to sit down at the table to eat of the children’s bread?”

Yes, it is great, beyond expression great, for such sinful worms of the dust to receive such mercy; but it is not too great for God to bestow; because God is infinite and incomprehensible in his essence—He

is so, in like manner, in his love; and can that which such a God displays be any thing less than great and inconceivable? In the view of it we are constrained to exclaim, *O how great is thy goodness, which is laid up for them that fear thee!* and, *As high as heaven is above the earth, so great is his goodness towards them that fear him.* The contemplation of it will, throughout eternity, be matter of astonishment and gratitude; but certainly it ought not to lessen thy confidence.

But there are others of God's children, who will say, "We scarcely know what to do. We dare not venture to approach the ordinance: we feel ourselves so unprepared for it, and yet dare not stay away; because, in such case, we would sin against the divine command. When we consider the state of our minds, we find them so lifeless and insensible, that we are totally devoid of any exercises of grace. How then can such presume to approach the table of the Lord?"

I reply, that this is indeed cause of shame and lamentation: but, perplexed Christian, pause a while; be not too hasty in forming a conclusion against thyself. Dost thou complain to man only? or is it a subject of lamentation with thee before thy God? Art thou satisfied with living thus? Is it not thy grief, that thy zeal, thy ardour and activity, are so weak? Would it not produce real joy in thy heart, if thy soul were exercised in a more lively manner? Canst thou answer these questions in the affirmative, and say, "Yes, the Lord knoweth how much I have been distressed because of my barrenness?" thou mayest not stay from the table to which thou art invited: this would be like the sick man that would refuse the assistance of a physician to remove his disorder. Whither wilt thou go? Is there any

other way of relief? Is it not Jesus alone that can help thee? Come then, as one that is sick and wounded; lie at this pool of Bethesda; wait for the moving of the waters: who knows what God may yet do for thee? And though thou mayest not be able to go with such a sense of thy wants, and of the fulness of Christ, as is desirable,—go, believing and waiting upon the Lord.

Or sayest thou, “I was somewhat animated and encouraged whilst attending on the service previous to the administration of the supper: yet when I arise to go to the table, all this seems to be at an end: my heart is cold, and my confidence is no more.”

But may not this arise from this source, that in going forward, the wandering eye diverts the mind from that on which it ought to be employed; and that Satan, who is ever on the watch, improves the opportunity to distract the soul? But when this is the case, be not too much troubled: withdraw thine eyes immediately from diverting objects: turn your attention to the Lord Jesus, and to his blood, represented to thee in the ordinance as sufficient to atone for the sins of our holy things; and plead for strength to resist this and every other temptation, which may prevent thee from eating and drinking with advantage to thyself.

Let us all, then, with the confidence of children, go forward. May the Lord meet us in love, and vouchsafe to us that grace, which may be most for his glory and our good; that so we may experience this ordinance to be the real food by which our souls increase in grace; and that the eating of bread and drinking of wine may redound to his glory and praise.

A M E N.

T H E

PIOUS COMMUNICANT.

Lecture XIV.

ON THE CONDUCT OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD
AFTER A COMMUNION SABBATH.



IN the two preceding lectures, we have spoken at large on the great subjects of preparation for an acceptable and profitable approach to the table of the Lord, and of the deportment of the people of God, on a communion sabbath. We shall, in the present lecture, enquire, how they ought to conduct themselves, after an occasion so solemn;—or, in other words, what duties a Christian must engage in, that his soul may be benefited by the ordinance.

In doing this, we propose to observe the following method :

1. To shew that believers are under the strongest obligations of expressing their gratitude to God, by a holy walk.
2. To point out the duties which they are under obligation to perform, after having been permitted to occupy their seats at the table of the Lord.
3. To attempt an answer to such questions as weak believers may propose, relative to certain

points contained in this and in the two preceding lectures.

4. To make an application of the subject.

FIRST. It is necessary for a child of God, after having attended the Lord's table, to express his GRATITUDE to God. The arguments which support this proposition are the following, viz.

1. All the blessings which God bestows, even those of a temporal nature, demand from us the exercise of gratitude. They are dispensed from his bountiful hand, without any merit in us, and they are blessings which none but God can bestow. Hence it is said, *He giveth us all things richly to enjoy.* Do the favours, which God in his providence bestows, require of us to be thankful? most certainly then, this great, this unspeakable benefit, which he hath conferred upon us as the God of grace, must obligate us to make grateful returns. He hath permitted us, worms of the dust, to sit down at his table with himself, the God of heaven and earth, that there we might hold most intimate communion with him; that there we might have put into our hands the pledges of his everlasting love, for the confirmation of our faith; and that there we might solemnly and publicly renew our covenant with him.

2. Consider also the object of the Lord's Supper. It was instituted to keep in remembrance the death of Christ, and *to shew it forth until he come.* Now how are we to shew forth the death of Christ?—not only by a pious calling it to our minds, whilst we are at the table, but by a constant, sincere, and faithful acknowledgment of the love which he hath manifested to sinners, by a return of love to him on our part, which is evidenced by words and actions, in the whole tenour of our walk and conversation.

As we have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so we must also walk in him, Col. ii. 6. Hence this ordinance is emphatically styled a *blessing or thanksgiving*. See 1 Cor. x. 16.

3. The same thing was represented in the ancient sacrament of the passover, in the room of which the Lord's Supper was instituted. In that ordinance, the goodness of God, manifested to Israel in graciously delivering them from the destroying angel which slew all the first-born in the houses of the Egyptians, must be remembered and acknowledged, agreeably to the command of Moses, Exod. xii. 27. Besides, there was a cup of blessing, which was distributed by the fathers of their families, which custom the Lord Christ appears to have also adopted, and the whole solemnity was closed with a song of praise;—which hymn Christ also sung with his disciples, after he had administered the Supper to them. All this was with a view to teach us, that after the use of the sacrament, in which spiritual benefits are brought into remembrance, we are also bound to give glory unto God. Hence has arisen the practice which obtains in our churches, that as soon as the ordinance is administered, the solemnity is closed by the minister, who pronounces the words of the 103d Psalm, 1st to 13th verse.—*Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless his holy name; who forgiveth all thine iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases, who redeemeth thy life from destruction, who crowneth thee with loving kindness and tender mercies.* Hence too has arisen the practice of delivering thanksgiving sermons, in which the congregation are excited to engage in duty, and to the exercise of gratitude.

4. We may also add all those passages of Scripture, which admonish us to praise, to exalt, and to

be thankful to God. As, Ps. cxvi. 12, 13, *What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits towards me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord.* See again, Psalm xcv. 1, 2, *O come, let us sing unto the Lord: let us make a joyful noise to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise before him with psalms.* Also, Psalm cv. 1, 2, 3, *O give thanks unto the Lord, call upon his name: make known his deeds among the people: sing unto him: sing psalms unto him: talk ye of all his wondrous works: glory ye in his holy name.*—And many others to the same purpose.

5. On a pious and suitable conduct after communion, depends our DERIVING real advantage from the use of this sacrament: for if, immediately after leaving the table, we return to the world, and our walk be irregular, we certainly could not have been nourished with this spiritual meat, any more than our bodies can receive nourishment from the immoderate use of food. By living in a becoming manner after a communion sabbath, we become as it were prepared to make a profitable approach to the next sacrament. When we live habitually near to God, it will not be a difficult thing to have our hearts suitably disposed for this particular duty. The true reason why we find so much preparation necessary, is, because we are not more faithful unto God. Hence we become estranged from God, and meet with much difficulty in recovering our filial confidence.

Having proved how necessary it is for communicants to conduct themselves piously after a communion sabbath, we proceed,

SECONDLY, To enquire what duties are particularly incumbent upon them.

First, There are duties to be discharged upon the sacramental sabbath itself. It is proper for Christians to attend the public service in the after-parts of that day, that with the assembly of the saints they may express their gratitude to the Lord, praise his name, and be taught the duties which devolve upon them, in consequence of that renewed instance of the favour of the Most High conferred upon them. Upon leaving the house of God, they should endeavour to keep their hearts in a calm and composed frame, as much as possible to avoid all kinds of company and conversation which will not tend to edification, and to retire in secret, with prayer and thanksgiving. Thus did pious David: when God made to him such precious promises relative to the establishment of his house and kingdom, he did not wait long, but as soon as Nathan had withdrawn, before any thing intervened, whilst his heart was so much affected and taken up with those promised blessings, he goes into the presence of the Lord, and in the fulness of his heart he exclaims in these words: *Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto?*—As if he had said, “ Lord, I am filled with astonishment! Thou surroundest me with so many instances of thy goodness, that I cannot find words to express my holy satisfaction. Wilt thou do so much to such a worm of the dust? *Is this the manner of man, O Lord God? The word that thou hast spoken concerning thy servant, establish for ever, and do as thou hast said,*” 2 Sam. vii. 18, 27.

O beloved! thus must we also do. Like David we must, in faith and affection, commune with God,

and with him express our grateful sense of his goodness.

When we are thus alone, we must proceed to examine how we have been exercised, both with respect to OURSELVES, and OUR GOD. In regard to OURSELVES, we should enquire, what were the frames of our hearts; whether they went out in ardent and sincere love to God; whether we drew near with earnest longings of soul after him; whether we could venture to apply the sacred symbols in faith, and lay our hands upon the promises; or whether we approached with fearful, doubting, distressed hearts. In regard to God, whether, in looking upon the guests seated around his board, he found us fitting clad in the true wedding garment, and addressed us, saying, *Eat, O friends, drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved*; whether he brought us into his banqueting house, and caused his banner over us to be love; whether he reached out to us his sceptre, spoke kindly to us, and said, *Be of good cheer*; whether, in a word, he gave us to enjoy a foretaste of *the marriage supper of the Lamb in glory*.

An investigation of this kind might produce these happy effects: On the one hand, if it has been a comfortable season to us, it might draw forth our gratitude, cause us to feel our obligations to a God so kind and bountiful, and humble us in his sight under a sense of our unworthiness;—and on the other hand, if we have found ourselves lifeless and dull, we might be led to seek after the causes which have produced such a frame of heart. If we discover them, we will be naturally brought low before the Lord; but if not, it might lead us to acknowledge the sovereignty of God, in his dealings with us.

But our duties are not confined to those which are

to be performed on a sacramental sabbath. We therefore, **SECONDLY**, observe, that communicants must also endeavour, through grace, to attend to the following things.

1. To **PRESERVE** a tranquil, even, and tender frame; which evidences itself,—

a. In regard to **GOD**, in a *firm purpose of heart to cleave to him*, to hold him fast, and to follow him as a wife her husband, a child its father, a disciple his teacher, a servant his master. This is called in the word of God, *to walk before the Lord*, and *to be perfect*, Gen. xvii. 1. This is *to walk with God* as Noah and Enoch did, Gen. v. 24, and vi. 2. This is *to cleave to the Lord, as a girdle to the loins of a man*, Jer. xiii. 4. Thus must communicants follow the Lord, by obeying his precepts, and by cordially submitting to all those dispensations, whether of providence or of grace, saying, *Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth.*

b. This calm and submissive frame, communicants must shew forth in the spiritual contest; for the Christian must again enter the lists, and contend with his enemies, who are always armed for the combat. If the warrior shall valiantly engage his enemy, he must not be too soon discouraged and alarmed; for in such case he is not in a situation manfully to resist, and is in danger of being overcome. So must the Christian, who is a spiritual soldier, whose business it is to fight when the trumpet of war is sounded, go forth with a composed mind, in the strength of the Lord God; knowing that the great Captain of his salvation stands in front, animates and encourages him, saying, *Fear not; I am with you.* But the Christian soldier must not be so much at ease, nor so confident, as to be inactive when his enemies lie

upon their arms. No; he must be constantly on his guard: for when the enemy is most still, then is the time of the greatest danger.

2. To a pious conduct after communion, it is required, that we be truly and sincerely thankful for the benefits we have experienced. Genuine gratitude consists in a humble, cordial, and pious acknowledgment of the mercies of Jehovah, and the faithfulness which he hath manifested in Christ through the Spirit. This gratitude is evidenced by the heart, tongue, and actions. We confess this with the heart to God, when we recount to him all his dealings with us, and praise him for all his wondrous works: for although the Lord well knows what he hath done for us, yet he will have us to know it too, and confess it. Hence it is, we find in Scripture so many songs of praise, which record the works of the Lord. A knowledge of God's goodness and faithfulness will make us humble and little in our own eyes, and cause us to say with Jacob, Gen. xxxii. 10, *Lord, I am not worthy of the least of all thy mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed to thy servant.* It will produce a sense of shame in us, and make us fall down with our faces to the ground, and exclaim, in the language of admiration, with Mephibosheth, 2 Sam. xix. 8, *What is thy servant, that thou shouldst look upon such a dead dog as I am?* It will lead us to set up our Ebenezers, and excite us to say, to his praise, *Hitherto the Lord hath helped us.*

But we must also express our gratitude with our MOUTHS and TONGUES,—to celebrate the praises of the Lord, *in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs,* to declare that *his name is great,* and with the Psalmist to say, *Come, all ye that fear the Lord, and I will tell you what he hath done for my soul,* Pf. lxvi. 6.

But, in this, we ought not to be too forward in mentioning our own experiences, which might produce the ill effect of cherishing in us a secret pride of being esteemed great Christians. Communications of this sort ought ordinarily to be made only in the presence of a few confidential friends: yet, as they may tend to the encouragement of our fellow men, we may make them occasionally when a good opportunity offers, even before the world, with a view of letting them see how delightful the service of the Lord is, and with a design of creating in their hearts a love to it.

But, above all, we must express our gratitude IN ACTIONS or by deeds; glorifying God by a holy walk, and evidencing that it is our desire *to mortify the members which are on earth*, that thus it may appear, that we are dead to the world, and risen with Christ. His love must constrain us, *because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead; and that he died for all, that they which live shall not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him that died for them and rose again.*

3. To a becoming conduct after the sacrament, appertains a frequent and proper exercise of soul, with respect to THE COVENANT into which we have entered with God; and that on this wise:

a. Contemplate frequently the PRECIOUSNESS of the covenant, the signs of which you have been using. Consider it as to its greatness, extent, and eternity. Call to mind its promises, and the faithfulness of God, who will certainly make them all good. This will serve as a support to your faith—This David endeavoured to do; see 2 Sam. xxxii. 5, *Although my house be not so with God, nevertheless he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, which is well ordered in*

all things, and sure. This is all my salvation, and all my desire.

b. Endeavour to keep always alive the recollection of the RELATION in which you stand to God, as your covenant God. Hath God become your Father in Christ? this reflection must lead you thus to reason: “If I call him my Father, *who judgeth without respect of persons*, how proper is it, that *I pass the time of my sojourning here in fear!* Yes—Is God my Father? then I have to do with a God who abounds in pity, and is full of compassion; whose bowels yearn, and who has declared, that, *as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him*. Even when I fall into sin, and backslide, he will not cast me wholly away: but as a father he will exercise compassion towards me still. Yes, the faithful and unchangeable Jehovah hath said, *The covenant of my peace shall not be removed*, Isai. liv. The consideration of this relation will not only encourage and strengthen the believer in every circumstance of life, but make him circumspect and tender in his walk; and when he has fallen into sin, and backslidden, excite him to go again to God, to confess his sins and backslidings, to seek for pardon of them, and to say, “Lord, art thou not my Father? Hast thou not looked upon me in mercy? Even from eternity hast thou not given to me thy Son, and with him all things? Thou canst not therefore intend to cast me now away on account of my sins; for thou hast said, *I have engraven thee on the palms of my hands,*” Isai. xlix. 16.

Again, we must preserve a lively recollection of our relation to Christ, AS THE MEDIATOR OF THE COVENANT, and call to mind, that at his table we have had a most striking evidence of his all-surpassing

love, which he hath manifested towards sinners, by giving himself up unto the death for them, as their Surety, High Priest, and Brother. This may lead us continually to enquire, whether our hearts are inflamed with love to Jesus, whose love burns in such a degree towards us. Yes, we must make use of him in all these relations, make them our plea, and say; “Dearest Saviour, hast thou given thyself over unto the death for me?—let me then experience the efficacy of thy blood for sanctification. Enter for me into the presence of thy Father: bear me upon thy heart. I know that the Father loveth me, but the contemplation of thy intercession affords me strong consolation. Thou art the merciful and faithful High Priest,—yes, the Almighty King. Break thou then in my soul *the power of sin.*”

Further, we must consider God the HOLY GHOST as our *Teacher, Leader, Comforter, Seal, and Earnest.* We must look much unto him, to conduct us in the way of life, and say—“Was it not thou who first causedst my heart to be willing to enter within the bonds of the covenant? Was it not thou who brought me to Jesus, and united me to him? May I not then expect, that thou wilt lead, preserve, and sanctify me still more and more?—that thou wilt shew me the way in which I am still to go?—that in darkness thou wilt be my light, in sorrow my comforter, and in distress my counsellor?—that thou wilt write the law of God on my heart, and make me to walk in thy statutes?”

c. We must often recollect, that on our side we have both said and sworn, that we would be the Lord's, that we would live for him, and walk before him,—that we have obligated ourselves to this in the most solemn manner. In virtue of our having thus

bound ourselves, we may plead with the Lord, and say—Hast thou wrought this grace in me in vain? hast thou made my heart willing to surrender itself to thee? and wilt thou withhold thy grace, by which alone I can make suitable returns by a holy walk? Yes: the remembrance of this will make us so circumspect, that when sin, Satan, and the world present their temptations, and lead the soul from God, we can say, I have renounced sin and Satan; I will serve those tyrants no longer; but am resolved to devote myself to God and his holy service. Luther said, we cannot better frustrate and overcome these tempters, than by saying to them, “I have passed my word, I have given it to Jesus.” Oh what an advantage does it afford us, when we can say to SATAN when he comes with his temptations, “I am loosed from thee: I stand no longer under thy authority: I have dismissed myself from thy service, and own Jesus for my King.”—And to the WORLD, when it offers its seductions, “*I am not of the world.* By the grace of God I have quitted its slavish service, when I gave my heart to Jesus, and took his yoke of love upon me.”—And when sin presents its allurements, to say, “I am freed from thy dominion, now that *I am under grace.* Should I again yield to those sins which have caused me so many tears, and so much distress and sorrow?” It is not easy to tell how tender, how watchful, and circumspect, such considerations would render our deportment.

d. We must constantly set before us the PROMISES of the covenant, and God’s faithfulness to fulfil them, and then, with a holy confidence plead them before him, saying, “Lord! thou hast made so many promises with respect to sanctification, preservation, comfort, sealing, support, and all things

necessary for me; and I have said *Amen* to them. I have laid my hand upon them, and approached thy table. Now then, Lord, let it be according to thy word. Thou art Jehovah, the unchangeable God, who will not break the word thou hast spoken, but fulfil the same, and make it *yea* and *amen*, to thy glory. Thou hast confirmed it with an oath, as Elohim, the covenant God; wilt thou not give me all needful grace? Lord, *do it for thy name's sake.*"

c. The covenant into which we have solemnly entered, and which we have ratified at the table, we must CONSTANTLY RENEW, and thus shew that we do not repent what we have done, but that, as we have sworn, so will we keep the righteous statutes of the Lord. We ought, upon every occasion, to engage in the act of renewing our covenant. We are not to think that it is enough that we do it when the ordinance is administered to us—No; it must be done daily. In every prayer we should give ourselves to the Lord. This will be found an excellent mean of promoting a tender and holy walk,—of awakening us, and of keeping us on the Lord's side, however it may fare with us, whether prosperity or adversity be our lot.

4. But in order to a becoming conduct after the sacrament, it is necessary that we be careful to follow the internal suggestions of the Holy Spirit. We must by no means grieve, oppose, or quench the Spirit, *by which we are sealed to the day of redemption*. When he awakens us to a sense of duty,—excites us to engage in secret prayer, and in converse with God,—or when he warns us against sin, and occasions of it,—or when he counsels us in times of darkness,—we must not act contrary to his holy admonitions, which

would grieve the Spirit, and cause him to withhold his sanctifying and comforting influences: we must follow his directions, and listen to his counselling voice. He is that good Spirit, who leads *into the land of uprightness*, Pf. cxliii. 10.

5. God's children must learn how to act in respect to *those sins which easily beset them*. In order to form right ideas on this point, we must,

a. Not think, that when we have been to the Lord's Supper, sin will lose its whole power. No; on the contrary, unless the grace of God prevent, it may then exert more strength. Therefore we must watch and pray, and be on our guard; for nothing destroys our confidence, or causes God to conceal from us the light of his countenance, more than sin. He is a holy God, *of purer eyes than to behold evil, or to look upon iniquity*: therefore we ought frequently to expostulate with ourselves thus: "*Shall I sin against God? I who stand in so near a relation to him? I who have been at his table, and again publicly declared my opposition to sin?—this would ill comport with the Christian character.*"

b. But we ought not, under a consciousness of deficiency, to go so far as to say, "We have received no advantage from attending on this ordinance."—No; you came not to it to declare yourselves to be without sin; but, on the contrary, to acknowledge yourselves sinners, to flee to the blood of Jesus for pardon, and to seek strength from him to oppose sin. A sense, therefore, of your deficiencies, ought indeed to humble, not to discourage you. Hear what the apostle John says for your encouragement, 1 John ii. 1, 2. *My little children, these things I write unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous;*

and he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

c. Under the deepest impression of sin, we may, from a consideration of our covenant relation to God, reason in this manner: “If sin did not exist in us, there could be no covenant of grace: but the God of the covenant hath said, *Ye, my sheep, the sheep of my pasture, are men*,—weak and sinful men.. I knew well that you would act an unfaithful part towards me before I took you into my covenant: but *I am the Lord your God*, your faithful, your unchangeable God: I will therefore never withdraw my affection from you. I have appointed a Mediator of this covenant, whose BLOOD *cleanseth from all sin*. This will I apply to you, upon your application by faith to him, and, with all your sins, cast yourselves at his feet.

6. To promote a pious conduct after communion, it is necessary that we HABITUALLY EXAMINE OUR CONSCIENCE, and seriously call ourselves to an account in the presence of God.—“Lord, what is my true state? what the real exercises of my heart? How have I conducted myself this day? Have I been faithful to my God, and to myself? Have my views been pure? Have I aimed at the glory of God? Alas! I do not converse frequently enough with my own heart: I am too great a stranger to myself; and even though I enter upon an examination of my soul, I pass it lightly over: and hence it is, that I become so much estranged from my God, and that I find so much difficulty in preparing for this holy ordinance.”

7. We must BE CAREFUL TO KEEP OURSELVES in the LOVE OF GOD, and of the BRETHREN. This is the exhortation of Jude, ver. 21,—*Belov-*

ed, keep yourselves in the love of God. We must see to it, that our love towards GOD be supreme and ardent. We ought thus to reason: "Has God given me such evidences of his transcendent love, and shall I not cordially love him in return? He is worthy of all my esteem and of all my affection; and therefore, *I will love thee, O Lord my strength*, Psalm xviii. 2. And as we love GOD *who hath begotten*, so must we love *those that are begotten of him*—conduct ourselves towards them in an affectionate manner, and do all things which tend to their peace and edification.—For words can scarcely express how much our peace with God may be destroyed by living in a state of enmity with our neighbour.

8. We must not be too timid or fearful in our walk, or, in other words, appear always to be filled with distress, and going bowed down; as if there were no joys, no satisfaction, to be found in the service of God. No; consider, that the *great God* is your Father and your covenant God. That you have for your Mediator, your Head, your Lord, your Husband, your Elder Brother, an all-sufficient, faithful and merciful High Priest,—and the Holy Spirit, who is invincible in his operations, for your Leader, your Teacher, your Earnest,—walk then as those who are of noble extraction: come boldly out for God and his cause: let the world see, that between you and them there is an essential difference; and that you belong to that *chosen generation*, that *royal priesthood*, that *holy and peculiar people*, who will *shew forth the praises of God*. In this way you might possibly bring them to conviction.

9. When you have been partaking at one ordinance, let your hearts long for another communion season, that you may again behold your God, in his

sanctuary. This would be an evidence that your hearts were fixed, and that it was your chief desire to enjoy the favour of God, and intimate communion with him.

These are the several parts of our conduct after a communion sabbath, which we thought necessary to mention. We now proceed to the THIRD thing proposed, which was, to answer such questions as weak believers may propose, relative to certain points contained in this and in the two preceding lectures.

First, Perhaps ONE may say, “*I am* convinced that I ought thus to be prepared for an approach to the table of the Lord, and thus to deport myself: but I know very little by experience, and therefore I cannot discharge those duties in the manner which has been recommended.” To this we reply,—

1. This must be matter of shame and humiliation to you. You must, on this account, lie low before God; for you have abundant means of instruction and admonition, but you do not attend to them: you seem to be opposed to them, and yield too much to the gratification of the flesh.

2. Enquire whence this arises. Is it not from a careless, irregular, and worldly walk and conversation? There are, perhaps, secret sins, with which you are yet unacquainted: or, if they have been discovered to you, you have not been enough on your guard against them, and have too readily yielded to the force of temptation.

3. You do not frequently enough retire from the world, and go to God in secret, in order to examine your hearts; and, from a consciousness of your untender deportment, you are afraid thus to engage in this work. But were you only to begin in faithfulness, and were you to suffer your hearts to speak,

they would accuse you of many things, and say,—In such and such instances you were not faithful; you dealt not sincerely; you suffered yourselves to be seduced from duty, to engage in worldly pursuits; and thus made yourselves conformable to the world. It is a bad sign when a Christian is so averse from self-examination: it is an evidence that all is not right with him,—that he is in a similar situation to the merchant, who is afraid to look into his accounts, because he fears the balance may be against him. But when it is well with the Christian, he is perfectly willing to lay open his heart before God;—and who can tell, but, if you were also to enter on this business, in an unreserved manner, with prayer and supplication to God, he might let you *see the wicked ways that are in you, and lead you in the way everlasting?* Improve then the opportunity which this sacrament offers, for engaging in this duty, to which it is well adapted.

4. But perhaps there are some whose doctrinal knowledge is but small, and for this reason have not been able to engage in the duties which have been recommended, how desirous soever of it they may be. It should be the business of such, to endeavour, as time and opportunity permit, to obtain more information. Are you unable to make researches for yourselves?—we remark, that many pious men have written on the subject of the Lord's Supper, with a view, in particular, to lead and direct such as you are. Make use of their writings; read them with attention and with a tranquil mind: examine every part; apply it to your own case: perhaps you will find something suitable to it; something which will affect your souls. Or perhaps, by this mean, God may expose to you some of the evils of your heart,

with which you have been hitherto unacquainted. If this be the case, lay down your books ;—go with your discovery to God ;—thank him for it :—earnestly pray, that the instruction which you have received may tend to your conviction, and that your knowledge may be more promoted. Or, is your heart awakened and affected ?—improve the moment ;—bring your hearts, thus moved, before the Lord ;—sincerely make a surrender of them to him ; but by no means let such an opportunity slip : who can tell how much you may profit by it,—what assistance from above you might receive. But you are not sufficiently attentive when you read : you pass over truths in a light and cursory manner ; and if you do not immediately find any thing applicable to your case, you discontinue the enquiry.

Secondly, ANOTHER probably will say, “ I have, agreeably to the qualifications which I possessed, and the desire which God gave me, been seeking to prepare myself. I have made a surrender of myself unto God. I have also approached his table. But it has not pleased the Lord to meet with me : I was barren and dry when I went and when I returned from that ordinance. And yet the Lord knows how much my soul wished it had been otherwise. How must I, in this case, CONDUCT myself after a communion ? ”

1. ACKNOWLEDGE, with reverence, the sovereignty of God in the dispensation of his favours. He imparts them at such times, and in such measures, as pleases him :—and when you entered into covenant with him, you made no stipulation in what ways he should lead you,—whether in light or in darkness ; you gave that over into the hands of Jehovah. Continue to act upon the same principle,—

fully possessed of a belief that he is infinitely wise and good.

2. Consider that the Lord may have reasons for his treatment of you, with which you are at present unacquainted. You may be too intent upon the sensible participations of divine grace, or upon having special discoveries of God's love. Now in the sacrament you are called to exercise faith, and to express your love to him; and if it please him to make you returns of his love, you will have reason to rejoice: but this wholly depends on his good pleasure.

3. Consider that the reason of God's dealing thus with you may be, that in your preparatory exercises you harboured some secret sins, and that God designs to make you more engaged in detecting them. If this be the case, his leading you in this way is a blessing, and will tend to advance you in holiness.

4. Consider that perhaps, in your approaching the table, your faith was not suitably exercised; that through distrust you kept at a distance from him; that through unbelief and the arts of Satan, you were afraid to give the Lord your hand, and enter with joy into his sanctuary, and to trust his faithfulness and loving kindness. Whilst the Eternal freely offers to us life and salvation, he will have us, with equal freeness, to accept of them.

5. Consider, once more, that the Lord deals thus with you to excite you to continue cleaving unto him—and saying, “Although it hath pleased thee, Lord, to subject me to barrenness and darkness, yet still I will adhere to thee. *To whom shall I go? Thou alone hast the words of eternal life.* With thee all fulness dwells. Even under all my discouragements I would rather continue to lie at thy feet, than to return again to the world.” Yes, he deals thus with

you to teach you to prize his presence more: so that, when he shall afford you his divine consolations, you may be the better prepared for the reception of them, and more on your guard against whatever may cause God to conceal from you the light of his countenance; for it is found in experience, that he kindly visits those who continue thus seeking, thus desiring, hungering, thirsting, and looking for him. Set, then, no limits to the Spirit of the Lord, but quietly wait upon him.

Thirdly, Others may say, “ We have been told, that our conduct after sacrament should consist in the exercise of real gratitude for the good we have enjoyed. That is indeed proper for those who have experienced some good: but as for us, we have much more reason of complaining than of praising. In what shall we be thankful?” Well, friends, is there no reason for the exercise of gratitude? Will you then despise the day of small things? Is not the smallest degree of grace great grace, and thus deserving of your gratitude?

1. Is it not great grace, that you can testify before the Lord, that on your part you have sought to act sincerely and faithfully?—that you can say, Lord, thou art our witness, that thou wert and now art our desire?

2. Is it not great grace, that you have such a sense of your unworthiness and emptiness in the sight of God, that, like the Canaanitish woman, you may lie at Jesus’ feet, waiting for the crumbs of his grace? To be little in our own eyes,—to be humble and lowly of heart, especially before, at, and after receiving the sacrament, is pleasing to God. We are then in a suitable frame, when with the centurion we can say, *Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come*.

under my roof. Then it is that we may expect to hear him say, as Jesus did to Zaccheus. *Zaccheus, come down ; for to day I must abide at thine house.*

3. Is it not great grace, when your hearts can feel disposed, on the offers of God in the covenant, to say amen to them ; to be enabled cordially to surrender yourselves to God, and to declare that you will be the Lord's ?

Although, then, you complain, that you have no reason for the exercise of gratitude,—when you consider these things, will you not find the contrary, even though God should bestow no more upon you than he already has graciously done : for the smallest degree of grace should raise in our hearts eternal songs of praise.

Fourthly, Another says, “ I hear some of the children of God speak with so much satisfaction and cordiality of the Lord's Supper. But sacramental occasions are for me seasons of distress, and therefore I am not profited by approaching. Whence does this proceed ? ”

1. This may be a TEMPTATION of the enemy, to keep you in a situation in which you cannot be rightly exercised : for he either presents to you the sacrament in such an awful point of view, as if God were present in the same, as he was present on Mount Sinai, and then your language is, “ How shall I, a worm of the dust, dare to draw nigh to a God who is so holy ? ”—or, by raising a variety of difficulties, he seeks to alarm you ; urging, that you have no right to partake ; that the bread is only for his children ; that you are not furnished with the wedding garment ; that Jesus, when he comes to see the guests, will say to you, *Friend, how camest thou in hither ?* and

that, should you in such circumstances approach, you would *eat and drink judgment to yourselves*.

But this temptation you must endeavour to remove. Are you enabled in your preparations to exercise a faith which only makes you cleave to the Lord? approach,—you have a warrant for it.

2. It may be, that the Lord himself, for wise and holy reasons, thus deals with you. Satan does it to perplex and harass you; but the Lord does it to make you humble and little in your own eyes, to create in your hearts a holy fear and jealousy of yourselves.

3. Besides, the fear of man, or some other cause, may excite a perturbation which you cannot easily account for. By this means the mind is discomposed and unfitted to engage in this solemn business. But we must seek on rational grounds to rise superior to these unreasonable fears, that the heart be not hindered and prevented from being properly exercised.

Fifthly, and lastly, Perhaps some of the children of God may say, “Alas! we are so often, even after communion, hurried again into sin, that we lose every advantage which we might have expected from that ordinance. What shall we do in such a case?”

First, I must answer, IN GENERAL, what I have often remarked, that the enemy is never more engaged in tempting us to sin, than before or after we have been at the table of the Lord. This he also does, when we have experienced any refreshings from the Lord, to the end that he may take away the sweets and comforts of the life of grace. Thus he has tempted many of the saints of the Most High. When king Hezekiah had done much for God, had wrought a great reformation in Israel, and could say,

“ Lord, thou hast dealt bountifully with me,” he immediately fell into the sin of pride: for when the messenger of the king of Babylon came unto him, he shewed them all his *treasures*, Isai. xxxviii.—And thus Satan conducted himself towards the Lord Jesus himself, when he was baptized, and received the *seal* by a voice from heaven, that he was *the Son of God*, in whom the Father was well pleased. Then he endeavoured to tempt him to sin; but he was disappointed; for Jesus never sinned, nor was ever guile found in his mouth. After Paul had been taken up into the third heaven, a messenger of Satan was sent to buffet him, lest he should be exalted above measure.

But, in particular, I must observe, for your encouragement, that a difference is to be made between sin and sin.

1. There are sins which spring from the indisposition of the body, which may overtake us after we have been at the table. For instance: a person has arisen early in the morning; was exercised in prayer: he then engages in the public service of God; he goes in the afternoon to the house of God; the body is sluggish and inactive; he cannot pay that attention which he wishes: drowsiness overtakes him.—This might afterwards produce distress, and he says, “ How unbecoming in me is it to have so little reverence and attention when the word is preached!” But this is not so great a sin as to render the ordinance altogether fruitless. No; so long as it pleases God, that in this wilderness we should struggle with these sluggish bodies of clay, he will graciously pardon this defect. He knows our frames, and *remembers that we are dust*. But what we have said must not be abused to an indulgence in sloth.

2. Examine your hearts before the Lord, and see how they are exercised in respect to sin. If you fall into it, is it a pleasure, or is it a cause of dissatisfaction to you? are you indifferent about it? are you unaffected with it? do you knowingly and willingly commit it?—then is your case alarming. But can you, on the contrary, say, “The Lord knows how much I struggle against it,—what bitterness it creates,—how I am opposed to it,—how it destroys my peace?”—all this evidences that you have declared sin to be your enemy; for a natural man sins, and comforts himself with the grace of God and the righteousness of Christ, and goes on carelessly as before. O that I could imprint on your minds this distinction between the sins of the world and those of the people of God! that thus the former might be brought to see themselves, and that the latter might be encouraged and comforted. For the grace of God, and the blood of Jesus, is indeed for sinners,—yea, for great sinners; but not for those who delight in sinning.

3. Do you find, that you are thus affected in respect to sin? what will you then do? Will you continue in this state, destitute of confidence in God, yield yourselves up to despondency, and say, “Now all the fruit of my attendance on the ordinance is gone?” No.—What course will you then take? The safest way is, to flee with speed to the throne of grace, before the breach between the Lord and your souls becomes wider. There with shame confess your guilt; that you have indeed again fallen into sin, but it was against your wills, and that you would not wilfully break your covenant with God. Oh! we must arise and go to our Father, and say, “We have sinned, but receive us again in

mercy." This is the most ready way of obtaining help.

The FOURTH and last thing proposed was, to make some improvement of the subject, applicable to the cases of those who compose this assembly.

First, We address ourselves to persons who are yet in A STATE OF NATURE, with a view to their conviction, and to discover to them their real situation.

With respect to PREPARATION for the holy Supper of the Lord, there are MANY who conceive that they are well prepared to approach the table, if, for some time previous to the administration of the ordinance, they keep themselves from the commission of those sins in which their souls are wont to delight. The secret language of such is—"It behoves us now to refrain from these for the present; for the season now approaches when the sacrament will be administered."

But, permit us to ask you, are those things from which you now refrain, sins? why then do you plead in their favour at other times? Are they not considered by God to be then also transgressions of his holy law? If, therefore, you continue to cherish them, and, regardless of the authority of Jehovah, persevere in them, what does this argue, but that you have never yet had a right before God to a seat at the Redeemer's table?

Others proceed a step farther: they employ themselves in reading the WORD OF GOD, and other books of devotion; and entertain an idea, that nothing more is necessary. They have no proper views of that preparation which is meet for an approach to this ordinance: they enter not upon any examination of their hearts, and consequently approach the table without feeling the least compunction for sin:

they come into the presence of a holy God, but it is with hearts un sanctified and unclean. O sinners, are you not afraid thus to appear before the Eternal's throne? Would you dare to sit down at the table of an earthly prince, with garments spotted and unclean? and will you presume to present yourselves before the Lord of heaven and earth with unhallowed hearts? Will you reach out your defiled hands, and take the holy signs of the covenant?—What may you not expect in return for such conduct? Will not God address you in these awful words: *What hast thou to do, that thou shouldst take my covenant in thy mouth? I will reprove thee, and set thy sin in order before thine eyes.*

Others, ON THE DAY OF COMMUNION, conceive that they have approached the sacred feast in a becoming manner, if their minds have been in some degree composed, if they have devoted the whole day to the service of God, and avoided those sins into which they have been accustomed to fall. But, O sinners! in faithfulness we must declare to you, that *Jehovah hates and despises your feast-days, and will not smell in your solemn assemblies*, Amos v. 21. Can it be possible that the Eternal should do otherwise, whilst your hearts, though at ease in their sins, are so contaminated and impure?—certainly he cannot. When the King shall enter to survey the guests who are seated at his table, he will say, *Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having on the wedding garment? Take him away, and cast him into utter darkness, where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.* And he was speechless.

If before and upon a communion sabbath, many rest on those qualifications which can never recommend them to God as worthy communicants, multi-

tudes also of professing Christians, act a part, after having been at the table, which is equally absurd and dangerous.

Alas! too many are found, who, if for some days after a communion sabbath they endeavour to refrain from sin, do, after a small lapse of time, forget their engagements at the table to be the Lord's, walk untenderly, and indulge in their former transgressions. Is not such conduct deceitful in the extreme? Do you approach the sacrament which Christ hath instituted to keep alive the remembrance of his dying love, and dare you, after vows the most solemn to live to his glory, pursue the paths of iniquity? Has the table of the Lord fellowship with that of devils? In the sacrament you declared that you had a full purpose of heart to serve Jehovah; but soon you broke covenant with your God, and again, charmed with your former courses, returned to the ways of sin and the world. And have you, since the last communion, seldom, if at all, reflected on the solemn transactions of that day? Will you presume again to approach in your present situation? Dare you, with those feet which have run in the ways of sin, again go to meet the Saviour in this ordinance? Dare you to receive the bread and the wine, with those hands which have been employed in administering to your sinful amusements? Will you presume, with those eyes which have been uniformly fixed upon the vanities of the world, to look through the sacred symbols upon glorious Christ? Shall those mouths and tongues, which have so repeatedly uttered sentiments so dishonourable to God and to Christ, taste of that heavenly meat and drink, which are spread on the Redeemer's table? O consider the absurdity of such a conduct—Consider, that to ap-

proach without any suitable impression, with unconcern and indifference, is to approach without profit, and to eat the children's bread without any covenant right to it.

But a word, before we close, must be addressed to the people of God. For if natural men are strangers to the life of true godliness,—if they know not the things of the Spirit of God,—they are ignorant of those important matters which have been presented to view in this and in the preceding lectures. But, believers, they are subjects familiar to you. Suffer us then to speak to you with plainness, and to express, in a faithful manner, the censure which some parts of your conduct merit.

Many of you are much engaged in seeking to have your hearts prepared to meet with God in the sacrament, and to be in a good frame on a communion sabbath; but ah! what little concern do you testify afterwards to glorify God! You have been at the table, and it seems as if you thought nothing more was required of you. You return to your business; you suffer the cares of the world gradually to steal away your hearts from God. You do not daily ask yourselves—“O my soul! knowest thou what thou hast been doing? Why hast thou so solemnly obligated thyself to the Lord to love and serve him? Do all parts of thy conduct correspond with thine engagements, and with the resolutions which thou hast formed to live before God?” Were you often thus to enquire into the agreement between your covenant vows, and the regard you pay to them after they are made, it might render you more careful to seek to live to him who died for you.—And the nearer you live to Jesus, the greater will be the advantage which

you will derive from an attendance on this holy Supper.

There are others who belong to the household of faith, who exercise all diligence to discharge the duties which have been recommended; but, alas! too often rely upon their own strength, and do not, with a humble and believing heart, look to the Lord, from whence all help cometh. The consequence is, that the progress they make is but very little. It is the will of God that his people advance in sanctification, but he will have them depend upon him for all needful grace. When they entered into covenant with him, was it not in full confidence that he would, agreeably to his promise, bestow grace to make them faithful to their solemn engagements? Is it not then reasonable, that, in all they do, they should wait upon their God to fulfil his promise? *I will cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments to do them*, Ez. xxxv. Is it not obligatory upon you to go to him, and to say, “Lord, hast thou not promised to aid thy children, and to *uphold them* with the right hand of thy righteousness? Art thou not a faithful God, who hast sealed thy promises of anew to our souls? let then *thy strength be perfected in our weakness*.” In this way, believers, you might expect to make rapid progress in the way to heaven.

But further, suffer us, people of God, to ask you, whether you do not blush when you consider, that the Eternal, having given you so many means of grace and so often granted you the privilege of commemorating his dying love in this ordinance, you should yet continue so weak in faith, and travel on with so slow a pace the celestial road? Whence comes it to pass? It is not because God is wanting

in his faithfulness; but guilt lieth at your door. May not the little progress you have made proceed in some measure from these sources, that after you have been at the ordinance you have forgotten your vows, or acted a part incompatible with them; that you have not quitted yourselves like men, when assaulted by the enemy;—that you have suffered to fall from your hands your spiritual weapons, and shunned the conflict, notwithstanding the most positive assurances that the Captain of your salvation will stand in the front of the battle, and himself fight your battles; that you do not daily search and scrutinize your hearts, to see how their exercises and dispositions comport with what God hath done for you; that you are ungrateful to God for his benefits to you, through your unbelief, forgetting that unthankfulness is a sin of the deepest dye, and that the smallest degrees of grace lay you under eternal obligations to take the cup of salvation, and to call upon the name of the Lord; that you do not maintain a lively sense of the near relation in which you stand to God as your covenant God, by a daily renewal of your covenant with him. Hence, the love of God, which once burned high, becomes a languid flame, and that affection which ought to be maintained for the brethren often cools, which never fails to disturb the soul, and to destroy its confidence: that you do not watch with a becoming care against sin, and suffer often the objects of sense and vanity to draw your affections off from God: that there are sins which are to you as a right eye, with which you cannot part, for which you plead, saying, “They are infirmities natural to us, which we cannot easily forsake,” as if on that account they rendered you less guilty in the sight of God. Know it, children of

God, that to yield to sin when it presents its delusive charms, evidences, that your walk is untender, that you are not so anxiously concerned to hold fellowship as you ought to be. Watch then against every appearance of evil; strive against those sins which easily beset you, and indulge in nothing which thy omniscient God views as opposed to his holy nature. The Eternal cannot take pleasure in the workers of iniquity. He cannot endure to see his people sin.

Are there not to be found amongst the children of God those who, though in the eyes of others they appear duly humbled, yet are filled with pride; who, when in company with other Christians, speak in exalted terms of their own exercises and experiences, as if they were far advanced in the divine life; but who, when alone, are languid, dull, and in a degree insensible; who, in a word, conceive that they have received from God somewhat more than others, whilst, in fact, it often is found, that what they conceive hath come from God is nothing more than the production of their own ground: and thus, whilst they think they have much, in truth they have received comparatively little. What absurdity for worms of the dust, for creatures sinful and polluted, to have such exalted opinions of themselves! Believe it, there is no sin with which God is more displeased than the sin of pride. When the heart of pious David was carried away by its influence to number the children of Israel, the prophet *Gad* was sent unto him with the proposition to choose one of three awful judgments, in order to bring him to exercise humility, 1 Sam. xxiv. When Hezekiah's heart was lifted up by this God-dishonouring principle, Jehovah visited him with peculiar expressions

of his displeasure, *Isai. xxxix. God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. He will turn his hands upon the little ones.* If, beloved, we did but see our sinfulness and pollution, we would be humbled as worms in the dust before God. When pride swells the human heart, it is an evidence that it goes ill with the Christian: for when the believer prospers in the divine life, when he increases in grace, he is then little in his own eyes. No man ever made greater advances in the divine life, than Paul; and yet he calls himself *the chief of sinners, the least of the apostles*; and declares, that all what he was, *he was by the grace of God.* If we possessed grace, even in a higher degree than Paul, still there would be abundant reason to be humbled, and to walk lowly before God.

See thus, why it is, that from one sacramental occasion to another you are deprived of the pleasure which always arises from the exercise of confidence in God; why you are in doubts and fears with respect to your state; why you enjoy not peace and joy in believing.

Believers, again we have pointed out to you the path of duty. Praise your God, that once more you are called to wait upon him in this holy sacrament, and that another opportunity is offering of returning to the Lord, of confessing before him your sins, of renewing your covenant, and of taking Jehovah again for your God. So unspeakably great is his loving kindness, that he will not forsake you, though you have proved to be unfaithful to him. He invites you to enter within the bonds of the covenant—Go then to the table, with humility indeed, but yet with Christian boldness—Go, occupy your seats there, as if it were the last opportunity that will

be offered to you in this world. Be filled with love to God: give him your heart and your hand, and say, " Lord, as long as it shall please thee to continue me in this world of sin, vanity, and sorrow, I will approach unto thee in this Supper, when opportunities shall offer, and eat of this bread and drink of this cup,—the pledges of thine unchangeable and eternal love, the earnest that I shall sit down at the marriage supper of the Lamb in glory. Let me be strengthened by this food daily, until I shall be brought before thy throne above, where the Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne, shall feed me, and shall lead me unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from mine eyes."

A M E N.

A P P E N D I X.

THE FORM FOR THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE LORD'S SUPPER.

BELOVED in the Lord Jesus Christ, attend to the words of the institution of the holy Supper of our Lord Jesus Christ, as they are delivered by the holy Apostle Paul, 1 Cor. xi. 23—30.

For I have received of the Lord, that which also I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus, the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread; and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat, this is my body which is broken for you, this do in remembrance of me. And after the same manner also, he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me; for as oft as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come: wherefore, whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup; for he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.

That we may now celebrate the Supper of the Lord to our comfort, it is above all things necessary,

First, Rightly to examine ourselves.

Secondly, To direct it to that end, for which Christ hath ordained and instituted the same, namely, to his remembrance.

The true examination of ourselves, consists of these three parts :

First, That every one consider by himself his sins and the curse due to him for them, to the end that he may abhor and humble himself before God : considering that the wrath of God against sin is so great, that (rather than it should go unpunished) he hath punished the same in his beloved Son Jesus Christ, with the bitter and shameful death of the cross.

Secondly, That every one examine his own heart, whether he doth believe this faithful promise of God that all his sins are forgiven him, only for the sake of the passion and death of Jesus Christ, and that the perfect righteousness of Christ is imputed and freely given him as his own, yea, so perfectly as if he had satisfied in his own person for all his sins, and fulfilled all righteousness.

Thirdly, That every one examine his own conscience, whether he purposeth henceforth to shew true thankfulness to God in his whole life, and to walk uprightly before him : as also, whether he hath laid aside unfeignedly all enmity, hatred, and envy, and doth firmly resolve henceforward to walk in true love and peace with his neighbour.

All those then who are thus disposed, God will certainly receive in mercy, and count them worthy partakers of the table of his Son Jesus Christ. On the contrary, those who do not feel this testimony in their hearts, eat and drink judgment to themselves.

Therefore we also, according to the command of Christ and the Apostle Paul, admonish all those who are defiled with the following sins, to keep themselves from the table of the Lord, and declare to them that they have no part in the kingdom of Christ ; such as all idolaters ; all those who invoke deceased saints, angels, or other creatures ; all those who worship images ; all enchanters, diviners, charmers, and those who give credit to such enchantments ; all despisers of God and his word, and of the holy sacraments ; all blasphemers ; all those who are given to raise discord, sects and mutiny in church or state ; all perjured persons ; all those who are disobedient to their parents and superiors ; all murderers, contentious

persons, and those who live in hatred and envy against their neighbours; all adulterers, whoremongers, drunkards, thieves, usurers, robbers, gamesters, covetous, and all who lead offensive lives.

All these, while they continue in such sins, shall abstain from this meat, (which Christ hath ordained only for the faithful) lest their judgment and condemnation be made the heavier. But this is not designed (dearly beloved brethren and sisters in the Lord) to deject the contrite hearts of the faithful, as if none might come to the Supper of the Lord, but those who are without sin; for we do not come to this Supper, to testify thereby that we are perfect and righteous in ourselves; but on the contrary, considering that we seek our life out of ourselves in Jesus Christ, we acknowledge that we lie in the midst of death: therefore, notwithstanding we feel many infirmities and miseries in ourselves, as namely, that we have not perfect faith, and that we do not give ourselves to serve God with that zeal as we are bound, but have daily to strive with the weakness of our faith, and the evil lusts of our flesh; yet, since we are (by the grace of the Holy Ghost) sorry for these weaknesses, and earnestly desirous to fight against our unbelief, and to live according to all the commandments of God: therefore we rest assured that no sin or infirmity, which still remaineth against our will, in us, can hinder us from being received of God in mercy, and from being made worthy partakers of this heavenly meat and drink.

Let us now *also* consider, to what end the Lord hath instituted his Supper, namely, that we do it in remembrance of him: Now after this manner are we to remember him by it.

First, That we are confidently persuaded in our hearts, that our Lord Jesus Christ, (according to the promises made to our forefathers in the old testament) was sent of the Father into the world: that he assumed our flesh and blood: that he bore for us the wrath of God, (under which we should have perished everlastingly) from the beginning of his incarnation to the end of his life upon earth, and that he hath fulfilled for us all obedience to the divine law, and righteousness; especially when the weight of our sins and the wrath of God pressed out of him the bloody

sweat in the garden, where he was bound that we might be freed from our sins: that he afterwards suffered innumerable reproaches, that we might never be confounded: that he was innocently condemned to death, that we might be acquitted at the judgment seat of God: yea, that he suffered his blessed body to be nailed on the cross, that he might fix thereon the hand-writing of our sins; and hath also taken upon himself the curse due to us, that he might fill us with his blessings; and hath humbled himself unto the deepest reproach and pains of hell, both in body and soul, on the tree of the cross, when he cried out with a loud voice, *My God, my God! why hast thou forsaken me?* that we might be accepted of God, and never be forsaken of him; and finally confirmed with his death and shedding of his blood, the new and eternal testament, that covenant of grace and reconciliation, when he said, *It is finished.*

And that we might firmly believe that we belong to this covenant of grace, the Lord Jesus Christ, in his last Supper, took bread; and when he had given thanks he brake it, and gave it to his disciples, and said, *Take, eat, this is my body which is broken for you, this do in remembrance of me.* In like manner also after supper he took the cup, gave thanks, and said, *Drink ye all of it, this cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you and for many, for the remission of sins; this do ye, as often as ye drink it, in remembrance of me: that is, as often as ye eat of this bread, and drink of this cup, you shall thereby, as by a sure remembrance and pledge, be admonished and assured of this my hearty love and faithfulness towards you; that whereas you should otherwise have suffered eternal death, I have given my body to the death of the cross, and shed my blood for you; and as certainly feed and nourish your hungry and thirsty soul with my crucified body, and shed blood to everlasting life, as this bread is broken before your eyes, and this cup is given to you, and you eat and drink the same with your mouth, in remembrance of me.*

From this institution of the holy Supper of our Lord Jesus Christ, we see that he directs our faith and trust to his perfect sacrifice (once offered on the cross) as to the only ground and foundation of our salvation, wherein he is become to our hungry and thirsty souls, the true meat and

drink of life eternal. For by his death he hath taken away the cause of our eternal death and misery, namely, sin; and obtained for us the quickening spirit, that we by the same (which dwelleth in Christ as in the head, and in us as his members) might have true communion with him, and be made partakers of all his blessings, of life eternal, righteousness and glory.

Besides, that we by the same spirit may also be united as members of one body in true brotherly love, as the holy Apostle saith, *For we being many, are one bread and one body; for we are all partakers of that one bread.* For as out of many grains one meal is ground, and one bread baked, and out of many berries being pressed together, one wine floweth, and mixeth itself together; so shall we all, who by a true faith are ingrafted into Christ, be altogether one body, through brotherly love, for Christ's sake, our beloved Saviour, who hath so exceedingly loved us; and not only shew this in word, but also in very deed towards one another.

Hereto assist us, the Almighty God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, through his holy Spirit, AMEN.

{ That we may obtain all this, let us humble ourselves }
 { before God, and with true faith implore his grace. }

O Most merciful God and Father, we beseech thee, that thou wilt be pleased in this Supper (in which we celebrate the glorious remembrance of the bitter death of thy beloved Son Jesus Christ) to work in our hearts through thy holy Spirit, that we may daily more and more with true confidence, give ourselves up unto thy Son Jesus Christ, that our afflicted and contrite hearts, through the power of the Holy Ghost, may be fed and comforted with his true body and blood; yea, with him true God and man, that only heavenly bread: and that we may no longer live in our sins, but he in us, and we in him, and thus truly be made partakers of the new and everlasting testament, and of the covenant of grace. That we may not doubt but thou wilt for ever be our gracious Father, never more imputing our sins unto us, and providing us with all things necessary, as well for the body as the soul, as thy beloved children and heirs; grant us also thy grace, that we may

take upon us our cross cheerfully, deny ourselves, confess our Saviour, and in all tribulations with uplifted heads expect our Lord Jesus Christ from heaven, where he will make our mortal bodies like unto his most glorious body, and take us unto him in eternity, AMEN.

OUR FATHER, &c.

Strengthen us also by this holy Supper in the Catholic undoubted Christian faith, whereof we make confession with our mouths and hearts, saying,

I Believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried, he descended into hell: the third day he rose again from the dead, he ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty: from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Ghost: the holy Catholic church: the communion of saints: the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting, AMEN.

That we may be now fed with the true heavenly bread Christ Jesus, let us not cleave with our hearts unto the external bread and wine, but lift them up on high in heaven, where Christ Jesus is our advocate, at the right hand of his heavenly Father, whither also the articles of our faith lead us; not doubting but we shall as certainly be fed and refreshed in our souls through the working of the Holy Ghost with his body and blood, as we receive the holy bread and wine in remembrance of him.

{ In breaking and distributing the bread, the Minister }
{ shall say, }

The bread which we break, is the communion of the body of Christ.

< And when he giveth the cup, >

The cup of blessing, with which we bless, is the communion of the blood of Christ.

{ During the communion, there shall or may be devoutly sung, a psalm, or some chapter read, in remembrance of the death of Christ, as the 53d chap. of Isaiah, the 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, and 18, chapters of John, or the like. }

{ After the COMMUNION, }
{ the Minister shall say, }

Beloved in the Lord, since the Lord hath now fed our souls at his table, let us therefore jointly praise his holy name with thanksgiving, and every one say in his heart, thus :

Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name.

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.

Who forgiveth all thine iniquities: who healeth all thy diseases.

Who redeemeth thy life from destruction, who crowneth thee with loving kindness and tender mercies.

The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and plenteous in mercy.

He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewardeth us according to our iniquities.

For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy towards them that fear him.

As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.

Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.

Who hath not spared his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, and given us all things with him. Therefore God commendeth therewith his love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us; much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him; for if when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son: much more being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. Therefore shall my mouth and heart shew forth the praise of the Lord from this time forth for evermore, AMEN,

Let every one say with an attentive heart,

O Almighty, merciful God and Father, we render thee most humble and hearty thanks, that thou hast, of thy infinite mercy, given us thine only begotten Son, for a Mediator and a sacrifice for our sins, and to be our meat and drink unto life eternal, and that thou givest us a lively faith, whereby we are made partakers of such of thy benefits—thou hast also been pleased, that thy beloved Son Jesus Christ should institute and ordain his holy Supper for the confirmation of the same; grant, we beseech thee, O faithful God and Father, that through the operation of thy holy Spirit, the commemoration of the death of our Lord Jesus Christ, may tend to the daily increase of our faith, and saving fellowship with him, through Jesus Christ thy Son, in whose name we conclude our prayers, saying, OUR FATHER, &c.

The end of the Administration of the Lord's Supper.

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TO THE
REV. DR. JOHN H. LIVINGSTON, S. S. T. P.
WITH WHOSE FRIENDSHIP AND AFFECTION I HAVE
BEEN HONOURED,
NOT ONLY SINCE MY BEING CALLED TO THE OFFICE
OF THE SACRED MINISTRY,
BUT FROM MY EARLIEST YOUTH;

TO THE
REV. JOHN B. JOHNSON,
LATE A BELOVED COLLEAGUE, WHOSE FAITHFULNESS,
ON ALL OCCASIONS MANIFESTED,
HAS MADE AN IMPRESSION ON MY MIND WHICH
CAN NEVER BE EFFACED;

TO THE
REVEREND SYNODS OF THE REFORMED DUTCH
CHURCHES IN NORTH AMERICA;

AND TO
ALL WHO LOVE THE LORD JESUS CHRIST, IN SIN-
CERITY AND TRUTH:

THE FOLLOWING TRANSLATION OF THE PRACTICAL
WRITINGS OF THE LATE REV. PETRUS IMMENS,
IS RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED, BY

THE TRANSLATOR.

Albany, Oct. 25, 1802.

RECOMMENDATIONS.

Classis of Albany, Jan. 18th, 1798.

WHEREAS the Rev. JOHN BASSETT has been a considerable time engaged in the translation of a work, called "The Pious Communicant," in a high degree practical, and calculated to afford instruction and convey comfort to Christians of every denomination; therefore, Resolved, That the said work merits the attention of all serious persons, and is hereby recommended to the churches under our immediate care, and to all who bear the Christian name.

Extract from the minutes,

J. B. JOHNSON, Secretary.

THE practical work of the Rev. Peter Immens upon the Lord's Supper, is so well adapted to the instruction and consolation of real Christians, that an attempt to render it of general use by an English translation, deserves the encouragement of serious persons of every denomination. It is hoped, therefore, that the labour of the Rev. JOHN BASSETT for this purpose, will be cordially received and encouraged by the public.

JOHN B. SMITH, Pres. of Union College.

DIRCK ROMEYN, S. S. Theo. Prof.

Schenectady, Jan. 27th, 1798.

THE Subscriber having for many years been acquainted with the book, entitled "The Pious Communicant," written by the learned and pious Mr. Immens, Minister of the Gospel at Middleburgh, the chief city of the Province of Zealand, in Holland, recommends it as a work, which is highly esteemed by all that fear the Lord, and which has, under the divine blessing, proved beneficial to many precious souls, by exhibiting to their view the grace of God, as abounding to the chief of sinners—and by displaying the all-sufficiency of the Saviour, in the commencement, progress, and completion of the life of faith. The subscriber expresses his gratitude to the great King of Zion, for having inclined the heart of his esteemed friend to translate, for the use of the Churches of Christ in America, the above excellent performance,—and flatters himself, that every friend of religion will encourage the publication thereof.

PETRUS VAN VLIERDEN,

Minister of the Gospel at Sagerties.

Albany, Feb. 1st, 1798.

In Synod, Nov. 12, 1801.

THE Rev. Mr. Bassett having informed Synod, that he had completed a translation of Immens's Pious Communicant; the Synod expressed their warmest approbation of the undertaking; rejoiced that a work so justly celebrated for its masterly execution, and the vein of piety which pervades it, may now be read in the English Language; and resolved to patronize its publication.

NICHOLAS LANSING, p. t. præses.

P. STRYKER, Clk. p. t.

